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Book of Short Stories

# MERRY-GO-ROUND

by

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1948

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# PREFACE

It's two o'clock in the morning and the city is quiet. I heard the bell in the big church. That's how quiet it is. My father is snoring in the other rrom. I can hear him, too. And the yellow alarm clock is sitting on the kitchen table with the oranges and the apples and the crackers. I hear the clock ticking. An airplane hummed outside and a truck bumped past. That's all. And I'm in the kitchen eating the crackers and the apples and talking to you. That's the way it's been with me since I first remember - talking long enough to make a story. I love to talk and when I was little I used to say almost anything so that people would listen. I once told my friends when I was about six years old that a wind came along when it was raining one day on my way to school and pushed itself under my umbrealla and lifted me up to one of the chimneys where I had to stay until the fire men came to rescue me. How then can I tell you anything about life? I was like one of those children who sit in the merry-go-round on a white horse with a red mane and a red saddle. There were times when I had to get off the flying horse and walk on the sidewalks and stand in line for a bottle of milk to carry home. We used to have to get there early to be close enough to the door so that all the bottles wouldn't be given away before we got there. And sometimes the milk trucks would be two hours late and the

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milk bottles would break on the sidewalk because my fingers were too cold.

So I grew. And these stories grew with me. Each thing that happened to me or to the people around me seemed to matter. Why? I don't know exactly. I only know that old Mr. Berd sitting on the steps and dreaming up things to buy with the money he never had was somehow important. And the stories my mother told me of her childhood in Sparta as she sipped black coffee from a white cup with a gold rim - they were important, too. And what happened to Anella, when she faced Andy in the shoe-maker's shop and tried to root her love in reality - was important. There were people in the world I lived in- breathing people- and they were important because they were people and because they were alive. There they were and I knew so little about them and about myself. I feel the sphinx was right when it said the greatest riddle in the world is mankind. The more I learn about people, the more there is to learn. And if I can create for anyone just a little more understanding of an other person's tragedy or happiness, then the purpose of the stories will have been fulfilled. This has been my problem as a writer then - to share as honestly and effectively as possible what I feel about people so that you and other people can feel it, too. That's how these stories grew. In their own way they tell the story of my life because each of them holds a part of it. I would like these stories to be more than that. I

would like them to be mirrors that reflect the values I have found so far in growing. I would like them to do that.

And I would like to say that these aren't all the stories I have lived. I am remembering more of them each day. But I am not ready to write them yet. I want to experience a lot more, to work a lot more, to rest for a time so the stories can grow. The tales in this book mark the end of the young girl remembering her youth or relating her thoughts and moods. I'm not sure about the child, though, - the one that rides the merry-go-round on the white horse with the red mane and the red saddle.

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# GRASSHOPPERS WITH GOLDEN WINGS

No trees grow on Shawmut Avenue. In the summer the sun beats down and there is no shade, except for half a sidewalk full of shadows which the buildings cast. The trees were cut down long ago to make room for the cement pavements and the tall brick tenements, choking the space where the trees could grow until all the soft earth was shelled under hard gray concrete layers, and places where people could live took the place of the trees. There are cracks along the pavements where the shell is breaking, but the soft mud of the earth is too far down where it cannot ooze through these cracks, and many of the people have forgotten that the mud is there.

Shawmut Avenue looks very much like any other one of the streets in the South End. A space where the trees can grow has been fenced in with iron pickets along the middle of some of the streets. This fence keeps people away. Except that sometimes the small boys, led by an unbridled tom-boy in torn, grey overalls and bare feet, will clamber over the iron spikes on to the soft earth within, wrap their legs and arms around the aging tree trunks, and shin up as far as they can go. Children like Erena and some of the others on Shawmut Avenue liked the steel challenge that the iron spikes seemed to throw out to them. Erena liked to climb the trees. It made Erena feel closer to the

sky. It made her feel vast and satisfied. Maybe the feeling Erena had sitting above the world among the green leaves of the tree she had climbed was the same one that Annie Mazzoni, who lived downstairs, had when she held her wrinkled baby pressed to her breast for the very first time. "It's exactly the same feeling, only different," Erena thought.

The children on Shawmut Avenue have no trees. When they want to climb, they go to Rutland Street. Most of the time they climb the Trees of Heaven and the wooden fences in the back alleys and the lamp-posts and street signs on the sidewalks of Boston. They hunt for lost treasures like bed-springs and forgotten money sewn up in old socks hidden in the junk-lots and grass-lots. Or else they collect grasshoppers in glass hopper-cans - empty pickle-jars, olive jars, jam jars, or milk bottles - glass, because the grasshoppers can be looked at and counted without getting lost when the top is lifted. Grasshoppers have a way of jumping quicker than fingers can grab. Pieces of old newspaper, with holes poked in so the grasshoppers can get air to breathe, are tied with soiled string, torn ribbons, or rubber bands around the mouths of the hopper-cans in which as many as sixteen grasshoppers can sometimes be carried.

Erena already had one brown grasshopper in her hopper-can. A fist full of grass and leaves were in there with it. She did not like to look at the grass-hopper. Its little pin point eyes seemed to be staring straight into hers.

"How would you feel if you were a grass-hopper?" she asked herself. "I bet you wouldn't like it - especially since you'd be born with legs that could jump and only an empty rum bottle filled with drying grass to leap around in."

She stepped on the blue and brown candy wrapper lying on the side-walk. The late afternoon sunlight was reflected in the windows of the buildings on the opposite side-walk. It reminded Erena of King Midas and the touch of gold. For a little while the windows were touched by the sun and were more beautiful than plain glass. She looked at the drab brown grass-hopper. "Maybe the grass-hopper is an enchanted prince or an elf. It could be, you know."

"Hey, Errie!" Johnny Lyne was running around the corner. "Hey, lemme see the grass-hopper you got."

"No." Erena tucked the rum bottle under her left armpit against her torn gray overalls and covered it with the fingers in her right hand. "You can't see it." She kept on walking, pressing her bare feet against the warm hardness of the pavement. "You wouldn't let me see yours, yesterday."

"If I let you see mine now, then will ya?" He was walking next to her. Johnny had watery blue eyes just like his father's.

"Go on home, Johnny, your mother's calling you."

"She is not. Lemme see your grass-hopper." Johnny pulled his hopper-can out of the soiled, brown paper bag he always carried it in. "See, here's mine. Ain't it a beaut?

All shiny black."

Erena tried to blow away the strings of her brown hair that had fallen in her face and were tickling her nose. "If I showed mine to you, you'd be turned to stone."

"I would not."

"Yes, you would. It's a magic grass-hopper. It's got golden wings."

"Golden wings? Aw Erry, lemme see."

"It's as big as this whole rum bottle."

"I don't believe you."

"No one asked you to. And if I let it go, it'll give me a wish."

"Why don't you let it go then?"

"Because."

"Why because?"

"Just because, that's why."

"Where did you find it?"

"None ya' business."

"Have you cross-your-heart and-hope-to-die got a magic grasshopper?"

"With golden wings."

"Seein's believin'."

"You'll be turned to stone."

"How come you can look at it?"

"I told you. 'Cause it's magic."

"Aww." He sat down on her steps. "What're you gonna

do with it?"

"Keep it."

"Then what?"

"I don't know."

"Give it to me?"

"No."

He stood up - feet apart, arms apart, in front of her. "Give it to me or I won't let you get in the house."

"Oh yeah. All I have to do is take my fingers off this bottle and you'll be turned to stone." Erena shoved against him with her body and left him standing on the second step like a stork with one leg pulled under him.

The hall-way was cool. The dank musky smell that belonged to the cellar was floating in the hall-way. Erena breathed deep. She liked the smell. It reminded her of the cool walls underneath where Johnny and she, along with Dickie and Curbie, played soldier marching round and round. That was before Bunny moved to Albion Street. Now they spent their time catching grasshoppers and ringing doorbells because Bunny said the kids in Brooklyn did it. Bunny had fourteen grasshoppers in her hopper-can - more than anyone else on the block; Erena thought playing soldier or climbing the trees on Rutland Street was more fun.

She climbed the stairs running the big toe of her right foot along the steel covered edge of each wooden step before she placed her foot on it. All the coldness in each edge of

steel seemed to rush into Erena's toe until she felt like giggling. Funny how the little edges of steel in the hallway were always cold no matter how hot the pavement was outside.

Annie Mazzoni was frying onions. Out through the cracks of the door, the melting sharpness of the onions floated. Then again, maybe the onions were being fried upstairs where Erena lived, and not in Annie's at all. Erena rushed up the flight of steps, pressed her nose against the brown wood of her own door, and smelled; but the onion smell was not there, only the dry wood and peeling paint. "Maybe I'll go down and play with Annie's baby for a little while," she said.

Inside her mother was talking to someone. The soft voice floated out in the hall-way, too, and mingled with the onion smell and the cellar smell. "Erena's been running around without shoes because we ain't go the money for it - and you have enough to gamble on the horses -" she was talking to Erena's father. She always talked that way to him when the children were not home.

"I notice you don't yap-yap if I win. Then it's nice to see the extra money. You don't yap then." He was probably sitting by the window trying to read the newspaper. "Leave me alone."

Erena moved away and started back down the stairs to the onion smell and Annie's doorway when she heard Johnny's voice.

"I'm telling you she caught a magic grasshopper."

Erena peaked over the edge of the bannister. Johnny and Curbie were coming up the stairs. Bunny was with them.

"Well, we're gonna see that grasshopper, ain't we, Bunny?"

"She won't show it."

"Then we'll take it away from her. That's what we do in Brooklyn."

"You'll be turned to stone. I'm warning you."

"Aww. Balony."

Erena turned back quickly, pushed open her door, and stepped into the kitchen. Her father was sitting by the sink soaking his feet in the grey and red dish-pan on the floor. Her mother was sitting at the table drinking a cup of black coffee.

"Well, what happened to you?" her mother asked. "Your eyes are as big as salad bowls." Erena slipped the hopper-can behind her.

"If Bunny wants to know where I am, tell her I'm not here." Then she ran into the bed-room and hid in the closet. She heard them knocking on the door. Her mother answered.

"Is Errie home?" Bunny asked.

"She isn't here," her father shouted.

"What do you want to see her for?"

"She says she's got a magic grasshopper, and we want to see it."

"She says it's got golden wings."

"A grasshopper?" her father was speaking again. "I told her to keep away from the grass lots. She's supposed to stay on her own block." Erena pressed harder against the closet walls wishing they would open and let her in to the other land she liked to imagine lay behind them.

"I'll tell her you came to see her grasshopper." Her mother was closing the door.

"O.K. Tell her we came."

"Yeah. And tell her we don't believe her."

"All right. I'll tell her." She closed the door. What's that child up to now? Erena!"

"Erena, you heard your mother. Come here!"

"Tom, there's no need getting excited."

"Keep out of this." He slipped his bare feet into the old brown shoes. "And bring that hopper-can with you." Slowly Erena came into the kitchen holding the hopper-can behind her.

"Look at your hair," her mother said. "Did you comb it this morning?"

"I forgot."

"Where did you get the grass-hopper?"

"Your father and I have told you to stay on your own block. Do you want a policeman to bring you home again? Like the last time?"

"We weren't doin' anything - just climin' the trees."

"Where did you get the grasshopper?" Her father's brown eyes were looking straight into hers. She did not turn away.

"A man, he gave it to me."

"A man. What man?"

"A blind man. He said, 'Here, little girl, is a magic grasshopper with golden wings. Keep it as long as you want and when you let it go, you can make a wish.'"

"You're lying."

"No, I ain't. Honest. The man was blind and this grasshopper he gave me was a plain, drab, brownish color. He thought it had golden wings. He didn't know. See," she showed him the hopper-can. "I couldn't tell him the wings were not gold. It would've spoiled his dream."

"If I find out that you're lying-"

"The blind man had on a greenish-bluish coat and a little tin cup in his hands." She lowered her eyes, "Can I please keep the grasshopper, even if it isn't magic?"

"Do whatever you want." He tied his shoe-laces. "I'm going out to buy some cigarettes." He slammed the door.

When the door closed Erena slipped into her mother's lap for a minute. The mother looked at the simple dreaming in the child's eyes. "That's the way it happened, mother. Only the blind man didn't smile. I wonder why he didn't smile."

"Perhaps he did smile, Erena, when you were looking at

the grasshopper, and you just didn't notice."

Erena smiled. "Can I go and sit on the fire-escape? I like to sit on the fire-escape."

"All right, darling. Go ahead, and call me if you see the blind man."

"I will." She laughed and ran into the bed-room. She put the hopper-can on the window sill. "I will." The little pin-point eyes were still pleading. She sat on the window-sill and stretched her legs on the fire-escape. All the time she watched the grasshopper. "Please, let me keep you for a little while."

Down below Bunny was shouting up at her. "Why don't you come down, scaredy-cat? Afraid we'll take your grasshopper away?"

Erena paid no attention. She sat on the fire-escape and dreamed. Slowly the twilight spread into Albion Street. The last traces of sun that had stained the window-panes across the way were gone now, and the glass in the panes was as clear as though the gold had never been there. The shadows grew longer until the whole street was dark - except for the two lamp posts glowing on the corner, and the patches of electric light peeping from behind shaded windows.

"Hush-a-bye. Lullabye.
Sleep. Sleep.
And dream of birds
With silver wings

That sing among the leaves and trees
Somewhere behind the stars."

Annie was singing her baby to sleep. The song came floating up through Annie's opened window below. It climbed the tenement's shadowed bricks and the rusty iron steps of the fire-escape and mingled with the moonlight playing on Erena's window sill and bed-room floor. The headlights of the automobiles that passed below flashed like long white fingers across the ceiling and the walls. Through the night the rushing elevated rumbled while the buildings shivered. Now and then an automobile horn would cut the air, and harsh voices and patches of talk drifted up. Tonight Erena did not listen to these brief patterns of other people's lives that touched hers for a moment, then were gone. She sat alone, dreaming and watching the moonlight hit the hopper-can and touch the brown shell of the grasshopper. Each time the moonlight touched the shell, the wings looked gold, and the magic was real until the moonlight left it dark again. "Maybe I'll let it go tomorrow," Erena whispered to the night.

## THE PENNY

Morning came and the greyness was slowly changing into day. Erena lay in bed between her older brother Tommy and her younger brother Len. She opened her eyes and uncurled her toes under the warm blanket with the pink and white stripes. She could see patches of the sky through the window that had no curtains to hide its clear glass. "It's still dark grey out," she whispered. "I'll wait a little while." She could see the buildings and the chimneys on the roofs and the bits of sky above them.

Her father was snoring in the small room where he and her mother slept. The snoring was part of every morning, as was the tick-tocking of the clock in the small room and the clip-clop of the horses pulling the milk wagons on the street, and the rattle of the bottles when the wagons shook and when the milk men dropped them into the cases where they belonged. Mike, the milkman, was whistling - "There's a rainbow round my shoulder -"

"And a sky of blue above!" Erena whispered. She liked Mike. His eyes smiled even when someone was telling him to call next week for the milk money. Besides, he promised Erena he would take her riding in the wagon with him some morning. "Maybe tomorrow," Erena said.

She turned and leaned on her elbow and looked at Tommy sleeping next to the wall. "Hey -" she pushed him. "That

isn't fair. It was my turn last night to sleep next to the wall."

"Go back to sleep will ya?" Tommy slid his head further under the pink and white blanket and closed his arms over his head and ears.

"I'm sleepin' next to the wall tonight, then -" She breathed against his neck.

"Aw. Go to sleep."

She pulled the pillow from under Tom's head and pushed it against Len's face.

"You gotta nerve, Tommy. Pushing me away from the wall and sleeping there yourself."

"Look. Tell me later. Right now I wanna sleep." He snatched the pillow back.

"Just because you're a year older -"

"I'll hit you -"

"Go ahead. I can still beat you up."

"Yeah - try it." He sat up and looked at her. "If you don't shut up, I'm callin' pa."

"Go ahead."

Downstairs Annie's baby started to cry. Tommy smashed the pillow. "Aw, now see what you done. I'll never get to sleep."

"Whatta ya wanna sleep for?" Len was sitting up in bed - knees up, head resting on his knees, looking at Erena and Tommy. "It's daylight."

"'Cause it's Saturday morning and I like to sleep Saturday mornings."

"Oh." Len's mouth yawned. Then he said, "Hey. Come on. Let's 'rassle'." He bounced up and down and the bed squeaked. "All three of us together, huh?"

"Tommy wants to sleep."

"Aww. Come on, Tommy."

"Look. You wanna wake up pa?"

"We won' wake him. We'll rassle quiet. The first one that talks is a jack-ass."

"No -"

Erena giggled. "Tommy's a jack-ass! He just talked. Jack-ass, Tommy."

"Come on, Tommy."

"I said no."

"Let's jump him, Len. Then he'll have to rassle."

"O.K." Len laughed and smothered Tommy's face with the pillow. Erena rolled on Tommy's head and Len bounced on his legs. Scramble went the bed clothes, legs kicked, arms pushed, bodies rolled.

"Ma!" Tommy yelled. "Hey, Ma! They won't let me sleep."

Len said, "Sissy! Callin' Ma. Fight your own battles."

"Big Sissy!" Erena said, too.

Tommy twisted his body and fell against Erena's bent elbow. The breath left him. He stopped struggling. "My stomach - Wait'll I get you out of bed."

"I didn't mean it, Tommy. Honest." Erena stared at his teeth tight shut so the tears wouldn't come. "We was just fooling."

"Yeah."

"Honest. I wouldn't hurt you."

"What happened?" Len asked, sitting flat on Tommy's knees. "Ain't you gonna play no more?"

"Tommy's stomach whammed into my elbow."

"Gosh!"

"Sorry, Tommy." She touched his arm. "Honest."

"Cut it!" He pushed her arm away. "Leave me alone."

"O.K." She looked at her elbow and rubbed it with her hand.

Then the door to the small room opened, and all three hid under the covers. They were lying with their eyes shut when their father came in. "What's going on here?" His voice was stern. "The racket woke your mother."

"We're sorry, Pa." Tommy was speaking. Erena held her breath as Tommy went on. "We were just havin' some fun. We'll be quiet now."

"Don't make me come in again," he said and went back into the small room where the clock was ticking.

Len sat up - "Gosh!"

"That's what you get," Tommy said, "for not lettin' me sleep. Next time he'll come in with the strap. Now will you lemme alone?"

"Sure, Tommy."

"Thanks, Tommy."

He snuggled a little deeper down in the bed and was quiet.

"Hey, Errie!" Len whispered. "Jackie tol' me you got a magic grasshopper. You was sleepin' so I couldn't ask you last night. Have you, honest?"

"Sure."

"Gosh!"

"I'm gonna make a wish on it."

"Me, too, Errie? Me, too?"

"Maybe." She closed her eyes again. "In the day time it looks just like any other old grasshopper - it's disguised. But last night when the moonlight was in the room, it put on its golden wings and begged me to set it free."

"Why din'cha?"

"'Cause I didn't have my wish ready. And, besides, I want to keep it for a while."

"Can I see it?"

"Sure. After I say the magic words so you won't be turned to stone. It's a beautiful grasshopper, Len. But its little eyes scare me. I bet they could go on looking at me even if the rest of the body wasn't there."

"Where'd you put it?"

"I hid it." She slid from the bed on to the rough boards of the floor and pulled on her torn, grey overalls.

"Where you going?"

"Out. To get it some grass," she whispered. "So it won't starve."

"Better watch out. Bunny says she's gonna beat you up."

"Like to see her try." She smiled and her hands were on her hips. "I'm not afraid of her anymore." She pushed the hair from her face. "Never was -"

"Jus' the same."

"Jus' the same. Don't you tell nobody where I'm gone."

"Not me."

"See you later," Erena said, and she sneaked quietly out of the house and down the steps in the musty hall way, out to the sidewalks and the cool air below.

Old Mr. Berd was sitting on the doorstep next door and looking at the sunrise. His small grey eyes darted from one roof top to the other, from one end of the sky to the other. Last night's Record-American was crumpled in the short fingers of his wrinkled left hand. Erena sat down beside him and watched the grey smoke uncurling from the chimney on the roof of a house across the street.

"It reminds me of galloping horses," she said.

"Mornin'," he said without taking his eyes from the sun and sky. His mouth closed before Erena could see the two gold teeth inside it. The gold teeth were on different sides of his mouth, and Erena liked to look at them and think: "Once upon time Mr. Berd was rich enough to buy two gold

teeth. Now he's so poor, he never eats any breakfast, and his clothes smell." It was not a nice smell,either - something like the muckiness of moldy bread and the oiliness of fish. Erena pressed her nose against the knuckles of her fingers to smell them instead. "I got a magic grasshopper, Mr. Berd."

By this time the sun was more than half way up above the buildings - between the roof tops and the sky. It was really daylight again and the sparrows were hopping on the curbstone and pecking at the manoor along the middle of the street.

"I almost hit the number, yesterday. If I'd played a six, instead of the seven, like you said. I'd of hit it sure." He spoke softly. A black house-fly circled carefully and settled on Erena's toe. She flicked it off.

"Did you sleep here on the stoop all last night?"

"I walked around all night thinking."

"Thinkin' what?"

"Thinking how I almost hit the number."

"Oh." The fly was walking up his pants.

He smiled - a thin smile that didn't show his teeth. Erena wondered where he got the money to play the number pool. Mr. Berd never worked. Just sat around all day and talked to people. The only thing she ever saw him eat was a lemon which he liked to suck as his lips puckered and his tongue smacked along the roof of his mouth.

"Mr. Berd." She tugged his sleeve. "You got a penny?"

He smiled again and reached into the torn pocket of his stained coffee-colored jacket with his short wrinkled fingers and the dirty finger nails. "Been savin' it for you. Got the number ready for today?"

"Aw. It's no good. It won't come out."

"You're 'lucky'. You said 'six' yesterday and if I'd listened I'd of won." His fingers held the soiled brown penny. "Give me a number and the penny's yours. It's an Indian one, too."

"But I feel bad when the number doesn't come out. Honest -"

"No penny." His fingers were ready to slip it back.

"O.K." Her eyes grew serious. "I say 'six' again."

"Six. Sounds all right to me." He crinkled the newspaper in his fist and handed her the penny.

"Thanks, Mr. Berd," she jumped up from the step, smiled at the oily penny in her hand, and skipped away to Peter's candy store around the corner.

Bunny was inside leaning on the glass counter with her elbow and looking at the penny candies below. Johnny Lyne was looking at the top in the next counter. Curby was opening squares of penny gum and looking at the pictures on the small cardboards in each one to find an Indian he didn't already have. Erena's penny was sweating in the clenched palm of her hand. She turned away. "I'll go get the grass

for my grasshopper first - then I'll get my glass doll." The doll cost five cents. It was one of those small, two-inch painted dolls that are made in Japan. This one was a little Dutch girl with a bunch of tulips in her hands. Erena had given Peter four pennies already and this was the last one. Today she could take the doll home and it would be hers. "I'll put it next to the grasshopper where they can both look at each other." Erena thought of the little tin soldier and the dancing lady and smiled. She stepped tip-toe along the sidewalk and avoided all the cracks. "It's bad luck - if I step on one - even if it's very small."

She played the game with the cracks all the way down to the grass lots and smiled at everyone that passed. She said "Hello!" to the kitten romping among the cans in the First National Store window. She listened to the city awake for another day - the peddlers were singing - "Tomatoes - Fresh ripe - tomatoes."

"String beans and spinach - ten cents a pound."

The ice teams were rattling and the drivers were shouting. "Ice. Your - ice."

And the junk man with the junk wagon and the drooping horse was turning the corner. Two kids were hitching a ride on the back and dangling. "Rags - edy - Bottles."

Erena listened and jumped over the cracks along the sidewalk. An organ grinder started turning the crooked handle on his machine and the melody of Naples in the sun-

light burst into the street where Erena's feet caught the tingle and she danced and whirled along the sidewalk. "If he only had a monkey!" she laughed.

She could still hear the organ grinder playing when she reached the grass lots. The tune had changed now - "Come to Sorrento." The music was far enough away to sound almost unreal.

Erena loved the grass. It was cool and clean. She liked to roll in it and bury her face in it, to smell it and the soft earth from which it grew. She liked to hold the grass with her toes.

The music played. Erena sprawled against the grass. She pressed her hands into the earth, and she was almost warmed to sleep by the sunlight while her sweating fingers still held the penny clenched tight.

"Hey, gang. Look who's here -" Bunny came running through the grass. Erena sat up. "Out lookin' for another grasshopper?" Bunny chanted. She laughed. "You're scared stiff of grasshoppers. Yer yellow."

Erena jumped up and faced her. "You better watch what you say." Johnny and Curbie moved back a step.

"Hunh" Bunny tossed her head. "You were jealous 'cause I took the gang away from you. You're too scared to catch a grasshopper - so you made-a-believe one. That's why you wouldn't show it to Johnny or any of us. There wasn't nothin' in your hopper-can. You're yellow and you're a

liar!"

Erena clenched her fists at her side. "You better watch what you say."

"Better watch what ya say," Bunny mimicked.

"I'm not afraid of you," Erena said, "and I don't care what you think. I got a real, magic grasshopper and I'm bringing it some grass home to eat."

"Grass home to eat."

Erena pushed past Bunny to the sidewalk and the way home. Her fists wer still tight-clenched at her side.

"Come on, gang. Let's follow her." Bunny had promised them a fight, and Erena knew it. She could feel them walking along behind her. It wouldn't be long now.

"Hey - slow down. I wanna talk with you." They were half a block behind her.

Erena could either stand or run away. She felt like crying. She wanted to run home and hide in the closet again where she could cry unashamed.

"Yellow Baby. Yellow Baby." They chanted behind her. She didn't run home.

She stood on the corner and waited. "Whatcha wanna say? I'm in a hurry. My grasshopper's hungry." Erena stood, tense and waiting - fists clenched.

Bunny came ready to jump. "A surprise jump," Erena thought. "She thinks I don't know, but I'll be ready."

"Say, whatcha wanta say," Erena said out loud. "Go

on. I'm listening."

"Jump, Bunny. Now." Bunny jumped. Erena twisted and Bunny hit empty air and hard concrete instead. Johnny and Curbie laughed at Bunny sprawled on the sidewalk. They were on Erena's side again.

"That's it, Errie. Give it to her."

Bunny was up from the sidewalk. Her face was flushed, her breath was sliding in and out through her clenched teeth.

"I'll pay you for that." This time Bunny didn't jump. She walked up and punched at Erena's left eye with all her might, but Erena moved and the punch hit her arm. Then before she could hit back, Bunny was on top of her and had forced her down to the sidewalk where they twisted and writhed. Erena whammed. Bunny kicked. A crowd gathered. "That's it, you, whatever your name is. Land it in."

"Hit 'er. Hit 'er."

"Look at her, the one in the grey overalls. Must have brothers at home."

"You oughta be ashamed of yourselves, standing here watching. Why don't you separate them," said a lady with a green pocket-book.

"Why don't *you* do it, Lady?"

"Now, you listen to me."

"That's it, Errie. Now you got her."

"Hit 'er. Hit 'er."

Erena fought as if her fists and body were living

whips. Bunny fought strong and heavy. Every blow hurt. Neither one would give up, and Bunny was winning. Erena was too light to hurt her. Then Bunny's nose started to bleed. Erena jumped on her. She nailed Bunny to the sidewalk with all her weight. Bunny started to gasp and try to put her hands to her nose to hold back the blood, but her hands were forced down by Erena.

"Take it back," Erena said softly. "Take it back - everything you said."

"I take it back," Bunny gasped. "Lemme up. I'm bleedin'."

"Say I'm not yellow and I'm not a liar."

"You're not yellow and you're not a liar."

"O.K." Erena still sat on her. She didn't have the strength to move.

"What's going on here!" Officer Charlie-the-cop came running followed by the lady with the green pocket-book. "Why - I oughter run you all in. Think it's fun, do you? To see kid's fightin'. Go on. Beat it. Break it up." The crowd started moving away.

"Good work, grey overalls," one man in a brown suit said to Erena. "Yeah." Johnny and Curby ran home when they saw Charlie the cop. Charlie lifted Erena from Bunny's chest. "Rutland Street gang. I might of known. Any time there's any trouble. Errie, tom-boy's mixed up in it. Wait'll your father gets you." He lifted Bunny to her feet. "You're

new. Just moved around. Shame on you fightin' in the streets."

"Let go of me," Bunny said.

"That I won't. I'm taking both of you home and have a good talk to your parents. What do you say to that?"

Erena said nothing.

"Oh, yeah," Bunny said. "Go ahead. That won't make any difference." Charlie started to push them ahead.

"Wait a second," Erena said slowly. "I lost my penny."

"Your penny?" Charlie looked at her.

"Yes, I dropped it when I started to fight."

"Is that i ?" Bunny asked, pointing at a penny in the gutter.

"Yeh." Erena stooped to pick it up. She saw Bunny's foot lifted and the toe hit the coin's edge. Erena tried to catch it, but the coin skidded away. Helplessly, Erena watched the penny roll down into the sewer. Then she pushed her face against the grate and watched the penny fall into the blackness below.

## AROUND THE CORNER

Billy Muldoon was peering down through the sewer grating. He was sprawled on the sidewalk with his head leaning over the curbstone. His forehead was pressed against the iron of the sewer and the fingers of his hands were closed about the bars. "Nope, don't see it," he said. "Are ya sure it rolled down here?"

"It came around the corner this way?" Erena made a circle with her toe against the dust of the sidewalk. "I saw it."

"Well, it ain't here." Billy kept looking down into the blackness and filth. A rusty looking, half-eaten apple bobbed around next to the broken fence splinter he had thrown down there just before noon time. He had watched it fall and heard it slap against the wet newspapers. "Not unless it's sunk down under the papers," he said.

"That was a real, hard, honest-to-goodness baseball. You better find it or I'll tell your brother on you. I'll tell him how you lost my ball, and how you hooked a ride on the street car this morning."

"Yeh," Billy pushed himself to his feet. "Go ahead." He half-closed his eyes and stood looking at her. "Go ahead. I'm through lookin' for your ball. Find it yourself."

Erena's right hand moved to her hip and she stood feet apart. Her head moved forward, closer to Billy's face. "You

lost my ball on me, and it cost plenty. You better buy me a new one. You better find it, or buy me a new one -"

"Aw, dry up, will ya."

"I won't. You better buy me a new one."

"Yeh. You and who else is gonna make me."

Erena's hand dropped from her hip and slapped loosely against her thigh. "I bet you stole it. I bet you found it already. I bet you found it and stuck it in your pocket when I wasn't lookin'."

"What if I did? Finders, keepers; losers, weepers."

"You give it back. It's my ball."

Billy shaded his eyes with his left hand and looked up at the gilded numbers on the tower clock of the church across the street. It was almost three o'clock.

"Well, ain't it a shame? I gotta be goin'," he said. "Blind Man Walters is waitin' for me to take 'im for a walk. Blind Man Walters trusts me, see." Billy started scuffing away. "He trusts me and he knows I wouldn't steal a baseball on any old girl. No matter how much I wanted it."

Erena stood helpless watching him turn the corner. Her eyes were wide, wider than usual. "I'll get even with you, Billy Muldoon," she shouted. "You just wait and see.

Erena stooped over the sewer and looked for her round, hard, grey baseball with the thin-lined maroon stitches. "Billy shouldn'a done that," she said softly. "I like him

and he shouldn'a done it."

"What cha lookin' for?" Ruby skipped up to Erena and sat on the curbstone. "Did ja lose a penny?"

"My ball."

"Oh." Ruby nodded her head. "Is it down there?"

"Billy Muldoon lost it on me."

"Oh."

"And now he's gone to take Blind Man Walters walkin'-"

"My mother told me not to play with Billy 'counta his brother. His brother's got a gun and gambles. That's what my mother says."

"So what. He takes good care o' Billy doesn't he? He won't let 'im hop street cars, or toss pennies, or swear-"

"Jus' the same. My mother says -"

Erena opened her mouth, sighed, then closed it again. She said nothing.

"And did ja ever stop to think," Ruby's eyes were thin with the secret she was about to disclose. "Why do ya suppose he takes Blind Man Walters walkin', huh?"

Erena shrugged her shoulders.

"My mother told me why. She says, Billy just wants to find out where Mr. Walters hides all the money he's supposed to have. Billy an' his brother's gonna steal it an' kill Mr. Walters. My mother told me."

"Aw, dry up, will ya."

"Well, it's true."

"Mr. Walters trusts Billy."

"Yeh, I know. Ain't it awful?"

"Aw, dry up."

Erena was going to walk away. Ruby folded her arms about her knees and studied the wedge-shaped lines in the curbstone.

"Don't cha think maybe we better warn him some time when Billy ain't with him, huh?"

"What for?"

"You wanna see him murdered?"

"Billy likes Blind Man Walters. He wouldn't do anything like that."

"Aw, no? He steals, don't he?"

"Yeh, He steals all right. I think he maybe stole my ball."

"See what I mean?"

"Aw, I ain't worried. He'll give it back."

"I ain't talkin' about your ball."

"I know you ain't. And anyway I don't really believe he stole it. And even if he did, it's just 'cause he ain't got one and wants to feel it in his pocket for a little while. Like when I sneak candy and pay the penny when I get it two days afterwards or the same day. If he's got my ball, he'll give it back."

"My mother says -"

Erena didn't let her finish. Her right hand moved to

her hip. She cocked her head and looked down at Ruby. "I don't care what your old mother says -", she said. "Understand?"

Then Erena heard the thump of the black, gnarled, wooden, snake-like cane against the concrete. Blind Man Walters and Billy were turning the corner and coming toward them. Mr. Walters still tapped his cane every few seconds as if to make sure of the hardness he was walking on. Even though Billy led him, he still tapped or scraped with his cane. "He must like the sound," Erena thought. "It's as if the black, curling snake on his cane were talking to him."

"Snakes never close their eyes," he had told her once, "even when they're sleeping. Their eyes are always open. I like to think the staring eyes of the snake carved round this cane see a little bit for me. It's nice to think that, eh?" He had smiled. His lips were wide, curled, smiling; his face was pleased, wrinkled, and smiling with his lips; but his eyes were wide, dead and staring like the little red eyes in the head of the thin snake on his cane.

"Afternoon, Mr. Walters," Ruby jumped up from the curb. Erena saw him smile slowly.

"Ruby," he said. "You're Ruby. The one with the fire red braids."

Ruby nodded and smiled. Billy touched Mr. Walters' hand. "Come on, Mr. Walters."

"Where you walkin' to, today?" Erena asked. Mr. Walters

turned toward her voice, but his eyes weren't looking at her. They were looking through the space to the left of her.

"That sounds like Erena." His voice was pleased, like a child guessing a riddle correctly. "We're walkin' to the park. Ain't we, Bill? Yeh," he said, "We're goin' to the park to hear the fountain spurtin' and listen to the old men talk."

Erena walked up to him. "Sit on my stoop and talk to us for a little while, huh, Mr. Walters?" She looked at Billy and didn't smile. "I like to hear Mr. Walters talk."

"You like to hear me tell about my dog, eh?" Billy started leading Mr. Walters toward the empty steps in front of Erena's house on the corner. "I know you, Erena - You and Bill here. You both like dogs."

"Some day I'm gonna have one," Bill said.

"I hope he's like my Max then, Bill. He was a dog as could tear you apart if you was wolf-like. He was a shepherd dog as didn' like wolves. And he could keep you together and keep you safe if you was sheep like. He was firm and steady when he led me, and he loved me. We was friends. I wasn't afraid to walk with Max, I tell you. I was proud. Like I'm proud an' not afraid to walk with you, Bill."

Erena saw the hardness around Billy's lips relax for a moment, and Billy's eyes looking at the Blind Man were not the eyes of someone who could kill. Almost as soon as Billy's lips softened, they grew tight and hard again.

"Yeh," his lips said. But no sound came and the Blind Man did not hear.

"You trust Billy a lot, don't you, Mr. Walters?" Ruby's eyes were thin again with her secret.

"Like my Max."

Erena held her breath and shook her fist at Ruby. Ruby shrugged her shoulders and her eyes opened wide again.

"Doggy Billy," Ruby said instead.

"Yeh. I'd like a dog just like Max," Billy said.

"Me, too," Erena looked into Billy's eyes.

"Better not sic your dogs on me or I'll tell my mother."

"If it wasn't for Max, I wouldn't be goin' to hear the fountain spurtin', today. Max took good care of me."

"Did he really fight those men who was trying to rob you on the street?"

"Fought them till they killed him. Then the police came. Saved my life - Max did."

"Gosh."

"Why'd anyone want ta rob you on the street. My mother says that won't happen 'less you have lots of money."

"Those days I used to have 'lots of money'."

"Ain't you got it any more?"

"Lost it. Lots of people lost everything they owned."

"You lost all of it? Hundreds and hundreds of dollars?"

"Can't say I'm sorry. Money couldn't bring back Max, could it, eh? Tain't really much good when you come right

down to it. Enough for eatin' an' sleepin' is enough."

"Jus' the same. My mother showed me all the nice dresses I can buy when I get rich. My mother say then I'll have lots of friends."

Billy sat silent on the first step and stared at the church on the opposite sidewalk and at the automobiles passing along the street. At times he would look up at Mr. Walters, and Erena saw how the Blind Man traced his fingers along Billy's back, felt Billy's arm to place his hand on Billy's shoulder, and Erena knew that Billy liked the feeling of the blind man's thin wrinkled fingers closed against him because he didn't push the hand away.

"Money ain't really much good, and the friends you make with it ain't much good, neither. You tell your mother that's what Blind Man Walter's says, and tell her he knows what he says is truth. There's lots o' things in this world that money can't buy -" Mr. Walters twisted his snake cane round in his free hand, and the snake seemed to come alive and writhe about it. His voice was low. He dropped his hand from Billy's shoulder. "And them's the things that's worth having."

Billy pressed Mr. Walters' hand. "Come on, Mr. Walters. We was goin' to the park. We only got an hour before I gotta go in."

The blind man stopped twisting his cane and stood up. He smiled. "Time goes. It goes fast."

"Yeh." Billy started moving away. "We better hurry, huh?"

"I wish I could come, too," Erena said. "I like to hear Mr. Walters talk." She uncurled from the step she was sitting on and started walking next to Billy. I can walk you to the corner anyways. My mother's gone down town and I gotta stay near my doorway."

Ruby skipped ahead. "I'll walk you to the corner, too.

Billy waited until there were no cars moving in the street before he started to lead the Blind Man across. Erena and Ruby stood watching them from the sidewalk.

"That Mr. Walters is a liar," Ruby was saying. "My mother says he made up that story about Max after the dog died. She says he's an old man an' he dreams a lot. And then he says he lost all his money." Ruby's eyes were thin again. "I heard of losin' a penny, or a nickel, down a sewer or on a sidewalk - but never hundreds and hundreds of dollars. He's got the money hidin' somewhere, an' Billy's gonna find out -"

Then Erena saw the black car. There were no automobiles on the street - only the brown milk horse hitched to the wooden wagon on the next block - when the car came around the corner. She heard its brakes tighten and its tires skinned the curb. Erena opened her mouth to shout but no sound came.

Billy and Mr. Walters were half way across the narrow

street and there wasn't time for both to jump. There would have been if Mr. Walters could see. Erena saw Billy drop his hold on Mr. Walters' arm to save himself, and the blind man stood alone feeling the concrete with his cane and trying to see through his dead eyes. The car came so fast, there was no time to think.

And then Erena saw Billy place both his hands on Mr. Walters' back and push the blind man away from the black car toward the opposite curb. Billy tried to jump with him. She saw the car hit Billy. She heard the thud of flesh against steel, and closed her eyes.

Ruby wasn't standing beside her when Erena opened her eyes again. A crowd was gathering and Ruby was somewhere in the middle of it. The black car was gone. Someone had phoned for an ambulance. She tried to run to Mr. Walters who was being supported between two men across the street, but someone held her back. Mr. Walters was vomiting and the people were talking. "Stand back!"

"Boy saved his life?"

"That's right. I saw the whole thing from my window. Slam-bang, it happened just like that -"

"What happened?"

"Stand back, I said -"

"Someone call an ambulance?"

"Is the boy still alive?"

"Looks dead to me."

"Ain't it funny what'll happen sometime? Fate's what I call it. Fate - just like that."

"Funny that no good Billy should be a hero. Really saved the man did he?"

"Yeh, life's funny like that."

"Aw, he was a good kid. It's his brother that's no good."

"Yeh."

"Just the same. My mother says it's a good thing it happened."

The ambulance came and Billy was being carried on a greyish stretcher. He was shoved into the ambulance. The doors closed and the ambulance drove away. "Nothing I can do," Katie had heard the interne say.

"Nothing I can do," her lips repeated. "Billy's dead, and there's nothing I can do."

The ambulance was gone; the people started walking away. Mr. Walters was being led past. She felt his wrinkled fingers brush against her arm. "It was my fault," he was saying in a quiet voice. He was talking to himself and his eyes were staring. "It was my fault." Someone was leading him around the corner back to his room.

"Poor Mr. Walters." Erena could still hear him tapping and scraping his cane against the concrete and in her mind she could still see the thin snake with the two red eyes crawling round it. "That's all he's got left now- that

snake with the red eyes." Erena held her breath. Erena couldn't cry. Not yet.

The whole thing wasn't real somehow. She had seen it happen, but the dream would end. It was night time, she was dreaming, and the morning would come again, and Billy would help her find her baseball. But the blood was still sticking to the concrete. Erena turned away and clutched her stomach with her sweating fingers.

Someone else was on the corner with her, watching her. He was standing on the corner and looking at her face. It was Billy's brother and for a moment Erena though she was seeing Billy alive again. "I never noticed you and Billy looked so much alike." Her words were low.

He stepped toward her. "I think this belongs to you," he said. In the open palm of his left hand Erena saw her baseball with the thin-lined maroon stiches.

"It rolled out of his pocket when the car hit him." His lips had the same hard lines Billy's did. The skin on his cheeks and around his lips was tight and his eyes were wide, cold and staring. "Someone picked it up and gave it to me thinking it was his." His voice was firm and without emotion; but he talked slower than he usually talked, almost as if he were afraid to talk. "But I know it belongs to you 'cause 'Erena's got a baseball,' he used to say. 'A real hard one with maroon stitching and Erena's only a girl.' And I was waitin' for his birthday to give him one. Only he

didn't know it." Erena looked away from his lips and face down at the baseball in his hand. "Here you better take it," he was saying. "He stole it on you - and it belongs to you."

"He didn't steal it," she said. "Don't you believe anyone that says he did. I gave it to 'im. Honest I did."

"Yeh." His lips were mocking. "I know." Erena looked down at the concrete.

"He only wanted to feel it in his pocket for a little while."

"Yeh." His voice was softer.

The shock and unreality were passing from her mind. Billy was dead and Billy's brother was standing in front of her with her lost baseball in his hand. The tears were beginning to come now. "He was swell and fine and Mr. Walters loved him an' he wanted a dog, did you know that? He wanted a dog like Max - an' he didn't steal my ball. Honest he didn't."

"You better take it back," he said and put it in her hand.

"Yeh. I better take it back." She was not crying now. Billy's brother smiled slowly through his tight lips and walked away. "He didn't believe me," Erena said. "I couldn't make him understand." Erena stood alone on the corner, alone in spite of the people that were passing and talking and the cars that were driving past. She looked down at the hard, round ball in her fist. "Yeh. I'll take it back," she said.

"And I'll keep it. Only -" She pressed her soft fingers tight against its hardness and closed her eyes. "Only I won't want to play with it again."

## EPITAPHYO

It was Good Friday. Canella Dimitropoulos pressed her nose and cheeks against the glass of the flower-shop window. She was pretending that the glass was air and she could really smell the spicy sweetness of the carnations inside. The breath from her lips made a white mist pattern on the window, and her fingers traced an outline of a thin lined fern on the moisture of her breath. If Canella had the money she would buy more than an armful of the fringed flowers, the white carnations, and carry them to the church. Then she could help decorate Jesus's burial "epitaphyo." She could fit the flowers into the wire screening around the wooden stall-like platform --- "Jesus's coffin," Canella called it. She could share in transforming the hardness of the wooden frame into the softness of flowers until it seemed as if the whole ark were really made of carnations and calla lilies instead of unyielding wood --- the ark upon which Jesus's body was to be carried to the sepulchre again that night in the church.

"Hey!" Her brother Dini nudged her thin arms with his elbow, then sat down knees apart on the iron foot-rest of his shoe-shine box. He smiled up into her dirt smudged face with its serious eyes and half pouting lips. "Whatcha thinkin' about?" "The carnations." She curled her legs and slid down to the sun warmed concrete beside him. Her

chin rested in the space between her knees. "Dini, you and me's almost as old as each other, and I was just thinkin' maybe since Ma can't take us herself tonight, maybe she'd let us go to church together, by ourselves, huh?"

"Huh?" His head moved forward. "Aw, no. Not me."

"Aw, come on, Dini. You and me together. I want to see the 'epitaphyo.'"

"Didja stop to think a minute? What kin we put in the collection plates, huh? You know they pass 'em around about twenty five times, maybe more times, in one night on Easter week 'cause all the people go to church for a change. You know they try to make enough money so's they won't have to worry about where next year's rent is coming from. You know that."

"I got a quarter, Dini."

"A quarter? That won't even pay for the candles."

"Yes, it will. The ten cent kind."

"What about the collection plates?"

"We can stoop down and tie our shoes, or pretend not to notice."

He shut his eyes and thought for a moment.

"We can have fun, Dini. Just you and me. And afterwards when the priest gives away the holy flowers from Jesus's coffin, we can get one to bring home to mom. She'd like that, honest."

"Well, all right. If ma says 'O.K.', I'll go with you

and I'll even bring along the fifteen cents I made shinin'."

"Swell!" Her lips were smiling now. She uncurled her legs and tugged at his knickers. "Come on, Dini, let's go ask her right away."

So that night Canella and Dini went to church together- Canella in a crisp gingham, starched and clean; and Dini in his freshly pressed knickers and green tie. Canella knew that Dini enjoyed the choir and the candles as much as she did. Only he was a boy and never said anything about it. But he couldn't hide the smiling in his eyes or the satisfied peace in his face. Dini liked beautiful things just as much as she did. She could tell from the way he stared into the oval flame of the candle he was holding and the way he closed his eyes sometimes to listen to the chanting and the way he blushed and half smiled when he turned and caught her watching him. "I'm glad you're having a good time," she whispered.

She looked up at the blossoms on the "epitaphyo." There were white candles, thin and long, at each corner of the flowery arch over the body of Jesus. Black ribbons tied in bows that were flat and curling were around the candles and reminded Canella of death. And peace was in the small, thick cross of lilies-of-the-valley which crowned the canopy of red and white carnations.

"Maybe we'll get one of the calla lilies," she said to Dini," and maybe we'll get just a fern. It doesn't really

matter."

The collection plates were passed again and again. Sometimes Dini dropped a penny in; sometimes Canella did. Sometimes neither of them would. That night the priest chanted in his gold-embroidered robes, the choir sang, the people prayed, the wax candles burned -- the church was beautiful.

"Hey, guess what?" Dini was talking to her out of the corner of his closed lips. "Don't look up now, but that fellow with no face is here again this year up in the balcony and he keeps looking down at you." Dini stooped to tie his shoe. "What makes him keep looking at you, huh?"

"Maybe because I smiled and nodded at him last Easter."

"Yeh, maybe."

"What did Mom say happened to him?"

"His face was burned."

"Oh." She looked into the red, green, and gold of the ikon of St. Mary. "That's why." His face was an expressionless mass except for his mouth and eyes. Canella would never forget his eyes. They seemed to be staring through things like a blind man's. They were round, black and ageless. She didn't want to look up at him. His face was the only ugly thing in the beauty of the church. But her head and eyes turned towards him in spite of the invisible steely rod within her that tried to keep her looking straight ahead. He was holding one of the huge, dollar candles and leaning on the balcony railing. His eyes were looking at the people

below him. Canella looked at the wet wax of candle lump dripping and curving down the side of his candle. Then his eyes met hers. She saw him smile at her with his thick lips and nod his head. She knew she, too, had nodded in return and even smiled. Hundreds of people in the church, and out of those hundreds he had chosen Canella to smile at, and Canella had smiled back. "I won't look at him again," she said.

She looked at the priest instead.

The priest was swinging the silver incense-burner and blessing the people. Canella watched the white clouds of incense float and disappear into the larger air of the church. She bowed her head and crossed herself, slowly and reverently. The priest looked like Jesus in the ikons on the walls. He had the same smiling black beard and the same black eyes. He had the same long fingers and small hands. His voice was low with a hushed mellow softness that melted in the hardness of the air.

Time passed and Canella's ten cent candle was almost gone. It was time for the chanters to lift the "epitaphyo" on their shoulders and carry it down the aisles of the church, through the church, and back. The priest led the procession. The people kneeled, and the old ladies wept when the "epitaphyo" passed. In her heart Canella felt that Jesus had died again and she held only a ten cent candle to burn for him. She closed her eyes. When she opened them again,

she looked at the ikon of Jesus as a shepherd with the curled crook in his right hand and the woolly lamb snuggled in the curve of his right arm against his breast. "Why would anyone want to kill a man like that?" she whispered.

"Why does anyone have to suffer and die," Dini said.

The procession was over. The people moved into the aisles to get a holy flower from the hand of the priest. Canella and Dini were swallowed up in the crowd standing in the right aisle. The lines moved slowly, but the people didn't push. There were enough flowers on the "epitaphyo." There were always enough. Just like the little boy's fish and bread and the people on the hillside.

Then one man started to shove. "Hurry. Hurry up, there. Let me through." He was afraid there wouldn't be enough of the carnations. He didn't want a fern. It was hot and dry standing in line, and the pushing of the man made it hotter. Canella stretched up to see him four places in back of her and Dini. He had shoved himself up that far from the end of the line. A flabby face, heavy jowls, and a thick white mustache -- and his breathing was wheezy and asthmatic. Canella closed her fingers over Dini's hand. "So's we won't get separated," she said.

The two of them held hands and wouldn't let the fat man get past them no matter how hard he pushed. Dini's lips were a thin line. Canella's face was turned up toward the starry blue ceiling of the church with its white, curling, painted

clouds. Just a few more people, and she and Dini would be holding a white carnation to take home to mom. She would touch her lips to the priest's hand, take the flower, cross herself, kiss Jesus's folded hands on the "epitaphyo", walk past the collection plate, then out of the church with its rich ikons and melting candles with their black ribbons of death, into the clear air of the night outside.

She and Dini were standing in front of the priest at last. Canella smiled, took a deep breath, and closed her fingers to take the blood red carnation the priest was holding for her. The fat man had come up the three steps behind them. His face was flushed. He was gulping in deep breaths. "Patre," she heard him talking to the priest. "Patre." His voice was high and thin like a woman's. "There aren't enough flowers for us old ones. Are you going to give to the children, too?" It was true. There were only ten carnations left, and over twenty-five people.

Canella saw the priest nod and reach past her and Dini to put the blossom in the fat man's thick hand. She saw the fat man smile and bend to kiss the priest's thin fingers.

"Just a fern will be enough. Give us a fern then," she wanted to say.

"Move along and let the people pass," one of the chanters told them. "Move along."

"Come on, Dini. Let's go."

She did not dare to look at Dini's eyes. His lips were

tighter and thinner. His face paler -- candle white. "It ain't fair," she heard him say. "It ain't fair."

"Come on, Dini. We don't really need a flower." The ikons on the walls were blurry and the stained glass windows of the church shimmered. "I won't cry, Dini. I won't give them the satisfaction. I won't cry." She stumbled on the smooth boards. Dini's arm caught her and pulled her close. But it was easy to cry, and the tears came.

"Stop, will you. It ain't worth is. It ain't fair." His arm shook her. "Stop, or I won't come to church with you again. I hate girls that cry. Ain't it bad enough without you cryin'?"

Then Canella saw the fellow with no face again. He was walking towards them, moving past the people. "Here." The fellow with no face touched Dini's arm. His thick lips were smiling. "Give her mine."

Canella couldn't turn away. The flesh of his face was scarred. It had looked smooth when she had smiled at him in the balcony. His black eyes were like empty holes and she wanted to turn away.

"I'm sorry." His lips had stopped smiling. He stood there helpless with a fringed white carnation in the palm of his hand. "I saw what happened. I was watching you."

"It's all right," Dini said. Canella nodded.

"Please," his sweaty fingers touched her hand, pressed the blossom against her palm, and pushed her fingers over

the carnation's thin green stem. "I want you to have it." He was holding her hand tight in his closed fist.

Canella tried to smile.

"Thank you," she said softly. "Thank you very much."

"Yeh, thanks," Dini said. His thin lips smiled. "Thanks a lot."

Canella saw the thick lips in the scarred face smile back. She felt his fingers slip from her hand. "I'll see you next Easter," he said, nodded, and walked away.

"See you next Easter," Dini nodded.

"He wanted the flower himself," Canella said. "But he gave it to me."

"Yeh," Dini said.

Canella looked down at the fringed carnation in her hand. Its spicy sweetness seemed to fill the emptiness inside her. It seemed to fill the empty air around her, and she could not cry. "Come on, Dini. Let's go home," she said.

"Yeh," Dini said. "Let's go home."

## THE KNIFE

The dryness of old leather was in the shop. Shoe oil and polish had been spilled and used and clung to the cracks in the floor and the wall and moved with the low air that touched the benches and the wooden chairs, just as if the tanginess had always been there with them in the room and would never go away. Anella held the old leather smell inside her with her breath while she waited in the doorway and heard the last tinkle of the bell as she entered. The bell tinkled and mingled with the harsh staccato of the hammer banging nails into the black rubber heel of the shoe on Andy's bench. Four thin grey nails were pressed between Andy's lips. With four quick movements of his left hand, the nails were held against the slab of rubber heel, and with four quick jumps of the hammer in his right hand the nails were pressed, secure, to pin the rubber to the wood for a while.

"Hello, Andy," Anella said, and waited.

He listened, looking at the hammer in his hand and thinking, perhaps, that he had imagined her voice in the tap of the metal against the nails.

"Andy," she said again and whispered. "I came. Just like I said I would. Here I am."

He put the hammer on the bench and looked at the nails in the heel of the shoe.

"Come in," he said. "I thought I heard the bell shaking."

"I won't stay unless you want me to. Do you want me to stay, Andy?"

"My father isn't home," Andy kept looking at the shoe. "You can stay if you want to."

"Isn't it time to close the store?"

He wiped his hands against the black striped apron and twisted his fingers in the cloth. Then he pushed his fingers through his hair, catching the sweatiness on his palm. He moved the shoe away from him with his elbow.

"It's hot out," Anella smiled. "Hot and sticky. It's cool in here. Except your hair, Andy. Your hair's so red it looks like the lit end of a match stick. Don't touch anything with your hair, Andy. You might start a fire."

"Yuh." He pulled off the apron and hung it on one of the rusty nails in the wall behind him. "Like the lit end of a match stick."

Anella watched his long arm stretch to hang the apron.

"Your father isn't home?"

"He's gone out."

"Where?"

"He won't be back till ten tonight, I don't know where. He didn't tell me where." Andy lifted the key from under the green cloth on the end of the working bench and turned the key in his hand. "The key, it's cool," he said and dan-

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led it from his little finger. I'll lock up."

"Maybe I better go, huh, Andy?" She reached out to touch his arm and felt the small hairs on his skin, warm and wet against her hand. Then slowly like a wooden puppet whose thread is carefully moved by invisible fingers, her head moved to look at Andy's face. Her eyes turned from the key on his finger to the big bones on the back of his smudged hand, to the soft part where her fingers touched his arm to hold him, upward to the grey inside his eyes. From within her, the words came, and her hand slid from his arm. "All right, Andy. I'll stay."

He smiled. Andy smiled and the grey curtain lifted in his eyes, and Anella smiled, too.

"I'll help you lock up. Shall I pull the shades?"

"A little more than halfway down."

"I know where." Anella smiled then said, "Ought to. After all this time don't you think I ought to---"

"Yuh," Andy said. "I'm glad you came."

"I said I would."

The door was locked. "I'm glad you came. Are you?"

"Am I what?"

"Glad you came?"

He was pushing the key back under the green cloth and smiling.

"You wanted me to come." The shade was grazing the air and squeaking as she pulled. "Listen," her lips opened

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and laughed. "Even the shade is making fun, Andy."

"Huh?"

"It's laughing at us."

"Why?"

She looked at her fingers and the smile left her mouth. "Because. That's why. Just because."

"Yuh." Andy nodded.

"It takes something that can't feel or know and doesn't understand, Andy--it takes something like a window shade to laugh at us. I'm glad something can."

"Yuh," Andy whispered. "Me, too. Come on. I got some potato salad in the back---"

"Potato?"

"Sure. And if you're hungry we can eat some."

"Potato salad."

"That's what I said."

"All right, Andy. I didn't have any supper before I came. I didn't feel like eating."

"Keep me company," he said and walked into the other room. The smell of shoes and oil was in there, too.

"Where's the light chain?"

"Around your head somewhere. Feel around you with your hands."

"I got it." The darkness swallowed light and swelled with brightness. "We're alone, Andy, huh? Just me and you." She sat down on the gingham plaid that covered the

bed beside the wall. At night the bed pulled out, and Andy slept there with his father and rested his body against a black and white checked mattress with no sheet.

"Yuh. Just me and you."

Anella cut a potato lump with her teeth and felt the cold grains sweet against her tongue. The potato salad rested in a green dish and was piled in a mound of small white lumps with bits of parsley sticking from it. The black handled knife with the jagged, broken blade that had cut the potatoes for the salad was still on the table, unwashed, with the white potato crumbs still on it. A few of the potatoes had slipped from the dish and were on the table.

"You make it, Andy?"

"Like it?"

"Nice."

He touched her hair. "Your hair is nice. Let me feel it." His hands were loosening the tight steel pins that held it rolled firm against her head.

"Don't, Andy." She took his hands, held them for a touch and let them go.

"Why did you come?" He closed her small hands with his own. "You didn't have to come, you know. You didn't have to stay."

"I know." Anella stared at the pattern the shadow of her hands made in her lap. "I'll let you touch and feel my hair, Andy." She held his hands and moved them to her

head. "Here. I'll help you unpin it."

Slowly Andy's fingers moving under Anella's hands pulled each hairpin from its place, and Anella's hair unrolled to fall and touch Andy's hands and her hands.

"It's cool," Andy said. "Anella, your hair---"

Her dull brown hair was cool, like the soft touch of the raindrops in a quiet shower falling against her face and arms, cool and sudden like the raindrops her hair fell against their hands. Andy's fingers caught the strands, stroked and twisted them. Anella watched his fingers. He rolled the lomg hair around their hands binding them together and leaned his red hair to touch hers. His face was against her hair. His breath moved against the hair and felt warm on her hands and on her neck. She moved her face to touch his cheeks, and the smudged sweat on his face was sticky against her forehead. Tighter and tighter her hair was twisted round the hands. "Andy---"

His lips moved against her hair. "What?" They moved against her hair and made no sound. "Andy, I---" His cheek moved against her forehead. It rubbed and stopped, warmer than before.

"What?" Andy's lips moved again and whispered. "What is it?"

His red hair had caught the smell of the leather and the shoe oil in the shop. It was in his hands, too, on hers, and in her hair. Anella breathed it when she spoke.

"Andy, loosen the hair around our hands. You're hurting me."

His fingers in her hand relaxed a little and the hair slipped looser. Anella closed her eyes. "You're glad I came."

"Yuh." He smiled and his cheek swelled under hers as he smiled. "I wish you never had to go."

"Me, too, Andy." Anella's eyes opened and looked at Andy's, and she saw his grey eyes close.

"Andy, you know how much I want to stay."

"Yes, I know."

"But I can't, Andy."

"Sh---"

"And I can't come again."

"Don't talk."

"I gotta."

"Sh---"

"Andy, I gotta tell you how I feel." His face was turning and his mouth was curling over hers, but Anella bent her cheek instead. His fingers tightened around her hair and his lips waited against her cheek for her mouth to turn.

"What's wrong, Anella? I done somethin' wrong?" Like a bell, a little bell, like the small sound of the cool bell over his doorway, Andy's lips moved against her cheek and spoke words that slipped into the air, were heard a moment,

then were gone.

"I wish I never had to go. I wish I knew a way to hold things, Andy. Me and you, just me and you---"

Again the words fell into the room and became part of the lemon green linoleum on the floor under their feet, part of the black and white checked mattress on the bed where Andy had pressed against her and she had closed her hands around his red hair. The words were part of the half-eaten potato salad on the table. Anella listened to the words.

"Me and you," Andy said.

"Yuh," Anella whispered. "Me and you---. Only it ain't real, Andy. Somehow it ain't real."

He moved his face away. The warm wetness was still alive against her cheek. "It ain't real?" He smiled. "What ain't real?"

"You're laughing at me, Andy."

"You and me, Anella. We're in here, ain't we? Ain't I got my fists closed in your hair?"

"You're laughing." She tried to move her face away, but her hair was held too tightly in his hands. "Let go, Andy. Let go my hair."

"Why ain't it real? What're you talking about?"

"Stop laughing, Andy. This ain't no time to laugh. Stop laughing."

"I ain't laughing." He pulled her face against his. "I ain't laughing, Anella." His mouth was tight against her

neck and cheek and lips. The hard bones of his teeth pushed against hers.

In the kitchen the faucet in the grey sink was dropping water slowly against the stone around the drain. And some of the water tingled against the side of the empty pan that was standing in the sink.

Anella's hands were tight in Andy's fists. Their hands were bound together by the hair. Her fingers ached against the bones in Andy's hands. Her closed mouth hurt against his face.

And with each water drop that fell against the pan and tingled, Anella's breath pushed out and throbbed against the sound. "Please don't, Andy," she tried to make the water say. "Don't Andy. Don't hurt me anymore. Don't touch me when you know it isn't real." And she tried to move away from him by pushing with her elbows and her knees. Each drop of water fell, tingled against the pan a moment, then was gone.

Then Andy's eyes looked into hers, and Andy moved his face away. "You're crying?" and the words were hard and brittle like the water dropping in the sink. "What're you crying for?"

"I ain't crying." Her tongue pushed the words from her mouth and lips that were firm against her teeth.

"I thought you loved me," Andy said.

The silence waited; a drop of water fell into the sink. "I do. I love you, Andy," Anella heard the water say.

She looked at the wispy curling threads of his red hair. "I've been trying to tell you," she said. "I've been afraid to tell you."

"Tell me what---"

"Andy, I've been afraid you might not really love me."

"Yuh-"

"And I didn't tell you. I don't know how to hold things, Andy, hold them so they'll never change, so now I gotta tell you--"

"Tell me what?"

She tried to look into his eyes. "Help me tell you, Andy."

"Tell me what?" His fingers loosened from her hands and were slipping from her hair. "You afraid of something? You afraid of my father? What're you afraid of?"

"Afraid you don't love me."

The sharpness in his eyes cut into hers. "What makes you think that--something like that---" She tried to look away again to watch the pattern in the linoleum on the floor. The criss-cross lines and lemons on the floor linoleum were something unchanging and set, something firm to look at as she talked.

"Andy-" The yellow in the lemons was almost like the whiteness of the sun that had come in through the window and made a pattern on her hands in Andy's hair one day against the mattress on his bed. Her feet were cold against his

warm legs.

Through the quiet Andy spoke, "What's the matter?" And Anella saw the yellow part of the linoleum again.

"I was thinkin--"

"Yuh?" Anella could almost see the smile. She heard it in the thinness as he spoke.

"I wish, Andy, that you would tell your father about us-"

"Tell my father?"

"Please, Andy. I think he knows already how we meet when he's gone. I know because of the way he looks at me when I come in the store to say hello. I can't even come in to say hello anymore, Andy. He'll know for sure if he looks at me much more."

"You just think he knows."

"Please tell him, Andy. This way you act like we are something mean and should be hid and sneaked. If you're afraid, I'll tell him. I'll tell him how we want to marry."

Andy's breath moved against the quiet in the room.

"You won't have to be afraid of your father then, and me and you could go to some other place together. I can sew good, Andy, and you can always work in a shoe store. And I'm not so proud I can't wear the same dress. I can wash it at night and wear it clean next day-just like I do now."

Andy was laughing. It had sounded like the bursting of

a window pane of glass. Anella thought a brick had smashed the window and that the pieces were singing around her in the room. She shut her eyes and listened to the glass breaking in Andy's laugh. The pieces were too jagged and sharp. She could never fit them back again with her hands. "And what'll we eat?" The words were clear and cold like the glass. "Potato salad? Yuh. Me and you could eat potato salad-" Andy was laughing and Anella could not reach with her hands to stop him. "Yuh. I can just see us. No, thanks. I'm staying here. Go ahead and tell my father if you want to. Whoever told you I was afraid of my father?"

Anella's eyes were trying to push through the linoleum to the brown wood below it on the floor, through to the dampness of the earth below. "I thought you were afraid of your father. I thought that was why. I thought you knew how you got to marry me now so I won't have to be ashamed. I thought you knew-"

"Got to?" He unwound the hair from the hands and moved his hands from hers. "Ashamed-" His face grew tight and his eyes stared. Andy's mouth had stopped laughing and his eyes moved slowly, half-afraid, half sure of what he would see, from her eyes, to her lips part open and almost trembling, to her breasts, down to her hips firm against the blue cotton of her dress. "You didn't tell me-" He stood staring at her, holding his breath, afraid to move toward her or away from her.

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"I thought you knew, Andy," she wanted to say, but her lips were trembling, moving, trying to talk and her teeth were tight to keep the breath locked inside her. She saw his long arm move and closed her eyes. His hand slapped against her face and mouth. Her fingers moved to cover her face and were caught in his left hand and held firm to throb in his fist. "You're lying," he said. His hand slapped harder against her wet face. His words were quick like the slapping of his hand. "Cry. Go ahead and cry and tell. Tell the truth, or I'll slap you till the skin is gone."

"Andy-" she tried to pull her hands, but his fists grew tighter.

"Tell the truth," he said. "I won't stop till you tell the t~~h~~ruth-"

"God sakes. Leave me alone. I'm not lying, Andy. I wouldn't lie." The blows stopped and he let her hands go. "I was afraid you didn't love me, but I thought you already knew."

"Yuh." The words came through the thin space between his lips. "You had to go and spoil it all. Why'd you have to spoil it all?"

Anella looked at Andy's hands dangling open at his side as he spoke. The flesh around her eyes felt hot and big. She had to stare across the swollen flesh to see.

Andy was looking at her blue dress, and Anella looked away to the white salad on the table. The salad looked cool

with its lumps of white. The hotness on her face ate through to meet the rawness, the tightness coiled inside her. The hollow in the palm below her fingers ached in her hands.

Andy was looking at his shoes when her fingers moved against the table to close around the black-handled knife with the bits of potato sticking to it. The wooden handle was cold against her hand, and her fingers couldn't close around the wood. Then Anella saw her fingers tighten about the wood and slowly, quietly, carefully, move the knife from the table. The knife was firm against the hollow of her palm.

Andy's eyes were watching her hands now. Anella tried to loosen her hand from round the knife, but her fingers only gripped the wood more tightly. In one quick move Andy's big hands slapped against her knuckles, then against her elbow and her wrist. The knife was slapped from her fingers. It slipped across the table, bumped against the cloth and hit the edge of the floor against the wall.

"What are you trying to do?" Andy was saying and his hands were holding her shoulders and shaking her.

Anella stared at the knife lying against the wooden floor. "I'm not a nail, Andy, on any old shoe. You got no right to slap me."

A fist was trying to open her throat and push the aching out. Her teeth bit against her tongue. The salt taste on her lips melted on her tongue. "I couldn't have cut you

anyway," she said. "Not even if I got it close enough to touch your skin."

"You better go now," Andy said. "You better get away from me."

Anella's head was nodding slowly. "Yuh. I better go."

"What're you going to do?"

"I don't know," she said, and the lemons on the floor were whirling.

"You're going to have to tell your mother?"

Anella's head was nodding again. "And I ain't ever going to want to tell her. I ain't ever going to want to tell anybody."

Andy's arms moved to touch her and moved back to his side and dangled. "I didn't mean for that to happen."

"It ain't fair," Anella said and waited. Andy's hands still dangled, open, helpless. "You know it ain't fair."

"Yuh," Andy was saying. "I know."

"It ain't fair to anybody-" Anella was smoothing the blue cloth on her dress. "And first I was so proud."

"I didn't mean it this way." Andy said again. "I never meant to hurt you." It seemed his fingers dangled lower. "Now I don't know what to do." He was walking toward her. "I can't think, Anella. I wish I could think and know what to do."

"My God," Anella whispered. "Oh, my God." And she moved away from Andy toward the door, and it seemed her shoes

and feet were getting cut against the broken glass. "What kind of a thing've I done?" Her knuckles pushed against her teeth and Anella bit her hands. "What've I done--" The stillness in the room pushed against her ears. She couldn't hear the water dropping in the sink.

"You must be lying," Andy was saying. "That's it. You're lying. I ain't going to believe you're telling the truth. I ain't going to believe you're telling the truth. I ain't going to believe it." She wanted to move quickly, to run through the doorway, out to breathe the dry air away from Andy. "I ain't going to believe it," Andy kept saying. "It ain't true." His eyes were looking at the long mass of tangled hair that clung against her dress. Anella knew his eyes were looking at her hair. Slowly, Anella turned and stared inside the dull grey in Andy's eyes, and slowly the words came from the opening fist inside her. "You know-- I wish I stayed away tonight, Andy. I wish...Andy...I wish that I could kill you, and kill myself...I'm so ashamed." Her long hair whispered against the blue cloth dress as she walked away.

He stood there helpless, watching her as she moved out into the darkness of the shop, the shop with its tangy shoe oil smell and leather that were caught now in the wrinkles of her flesh and would never wash away.

## THE TALE OF POPPY RENA

Bertha lived alone on the mountain. Once a year at Easter time she would come down to the village and pray in the church. Then she would light a candle and go back to the mountain. She never spoke to anyone and no one ever spoke to her. Bertha lived alone.

"They say the wolves are her only friends and they never touch her sheep."

And the foxes that kill our hens. They're her friends, too, and the Devil's."

"I met her on the mountain once. I was coming home from Mistra. She was standing on the path in front of me with the moonlight on her like a ghost."

"Did you pass her?"

"I did not. I turned around, walked back a mile, and took the other path."

"They say it's bad luck to pass her on the mountain."

"Why does she light a candle in the church?"

"The Devil only knows."

Bertha lived alone on the mountain with her sheep. No one knew where she came from or who she was. Ever since anyone could remember she would come to light a candle in the church at Eastertime. One candle once a year, then she would go home to the mountain. Everyone wondered about her, but no one knew.

It all began with a field of poppies near Lacadaeman and a shower of rain.

Bertha was younger then. She was walking down a mountain path and thinking. It was the month before her wedding. "One more month for the springtime and the summer will be here. One more month and I'll be married." Her black eyes were big with happiness and her lips repeated the words. "I'll be married. I won't be alone any more."

Then she saw the poppies---a whole field of them ahead with the sunlight dancing in and out making patches of shadow and light in a pattern of red and white poppies.

"How lovely the poppies are! I'll pick some to take home and I'll put them in the blue bowl." She laughed when she thought of the home she had lived alone in for so long. Ever since her mother died, she had lived alone, and now she was going to be married and never be alone again. "I'll put them in the blue bowl and set them on the window where the sunlight can still shine on them."

It began to rain before she got to the field---one of those sudden showers that wet the earth without bothering to cover the sun's face with clouds. The rain drops, big splashes of drops, fell on the poppies and the mountain. Bertha tried to squeeze into a place over which part of the mountain jutted, but the rain fell there, too, and Bertha got wet anyway. She laughed again and she ran her tongue around her lips to taste the drops that fell on her face.

Soon a rainbow appeared over the field of flowers. "I'll think of that as a good sign," she said. "Rainbows are always lucky."

Wringing the water from her hair and dress, and laughing, she went to the field when the rain stopped. The drops of water still clung to petals and stems and grass, and the sunlight made other rainbows on the poppies. "How beautiful the world is. How wonderful!"

She was picking poppies when she saw the child. It was walking toward her through the flowers in a thin white dress with a yellow sash. The child seemed to belong to the sunlight and the raindrops on the poppies. It seemed to be a part of them.

"I must be dreaming," Bertha thought. But the child was real. It came to Bertha and smiled with blue eyes like the blue in Bertha's poppy bowl, a strange blue---a little deeper than the sky.

"Who are you?" Bertha asked. "Where's your mother?"

"I don't know," the child answered. It stepped closer and placed its hand in Bertha's. "Please, may I come home with you? They left me all alone in the rain."

Bertha took it home and on the way she noticed the child's dress and hair were dry. They had not been wet by the rain.

## PART 2

Bertha didn't go to the village after that for a long

time. She stayed with the child and was happy.

"Do you love me?" the child would ask, and Bertha would take it in her lap and think, "Some day they'll come and take you away from me. I found you, but you don't really belong to me." That was why Bertha was afraid to take the child to the village. Someone might take it away.

"I'll call you Mother because you're so good to me. What will you call me?"

"I'll call you Poppy Rena because I found you in the poppies."

"That's a pretty name, Mother. Thank you."

Sometimes Bertha would think of Michael and the wedding. She knew that she had never loved Michael. Now she wasn't lonely any more and she didn't want the wedding. She knew that Michael would never want a strange child in his home, and Poppy Rena had become a part of her life that she didn't want to lose.

At other times Bertha would think of her great love for the child and wonder why the child came and why its clothes had not been wet by the rain. Once she asked Poppy Rena why, and the child answered, "Do you love me?"

"What has that to do with it?"

"If you love me, that is all that matters and you don't need to know why." Bertha never asked again and she never found out about the dry clothes and the rain.

Then Poppy Rena asked Bertha to take her to church, so

they went to the village.

"You know, Mother, I've never been to church before. I want to see what it's like."

The people in the village stared. No one had ever seen the child before, except one old man.

"I saw her fifty years ago in the poppy field. A white dress with a yellow sash, she had on, and blue eyes."

"You're crazy, old man. That child would be over fifty years old now. The one with Bertha isn't over ten."

"Maybe so, but I tell you I saw her fifty years ago. I called her to play with me, but she laughed and ran away."

"You're dreaming."

"Maybe so. Maybe so."

Poppy Rena loved the candles in the church. She stared at them and watched their tiny lights. "Everything is so beautiful," she said. Bertha said nothing.

After church, on the way home, they met Michael.

"Hello, Bertha."

"Hello, Michael."

"Is the child yours? People are talking. They're saying it's your child with another man. They're saying you've kept it hidden until now when you can have a husband to give it a name."

"Do you believe what they're saying, Michael?"

"I don't know. But I don't want a strange child in my home whatever the story is. Do you understand that?"

"I understand. I won't marry you, Michael."

"It's settled then. There'll be no wedding."

"There'll be no wedding," Bertha said as Michael walked away.

"Did you love him, Mother?"

"I thought I did once, but I know now it was just because I was lonely. I love you more," she said.

Her life with Poppy Rena was happy. They worked together during the week, and Sundays they went to church together and Poppy Rena could look at the candles.

One night Bertha woke with a start. The child was not on the bed beside her. She put on her shawl and rushed out on the mountain to the poppy field. Moonlight was everywhere.

"Poppy Rena, where are you?" There was no answer.

"Where are you?" Suppose the child had gone away forever. "Where are you?" she called again. "Poppy Rena, come back."

Then she remembered the church. Perhaps it was the moonlight that reminded her. She started running to the church and she met Poppy Rena on the path. The child was weeping. Bertha lifted it in her arms and carried it home.

"I went to the church, Mother, because I wanted to see the candles."

"Don't cry any more, darling."

"But there weren't any candles. It was dark. There

weren't any candles."

"You must promise never to leave me again without telling me where you're going. You don't know how you frightened me, child."

"It was black and lonely there. No candles at all. I hated it without the candles. I felt alone."

"Try and sleep now, darling. Try and forget."

But Poppy Rena didn't sleep. She lay awake and stared at the moonlight with her strange eyes awake and dreaming.

Part 3

At Easter time the poppies bloomed. For a long time Bertha had been afraid to see the poppies in bloom again. Three years had passed since she first met the child and every Easter time of each of those three years she was afraid she would lose the child. Poppy Rena had become a part of her life that Bertha didn't want to lose. She was afraid of being left alone again. Now the fear was more real than it had ever been before. One more week for the poppies to bloom. One more week till Easter.

Poppy Rena had a secret place in the poppy field that no one knew about. It was by a small, rough rock near the middle of the field where she hid a box.

One night Bertha discovered the secret place and the box when Poppy Rena went out. Poppy Rena went out every night but she always came back. Bertha never stopped her. She wanted Poppy Rena to be happy. Bertha always let her go, but she was always afraid that Poppy Rena would not come

back. On this night, she decided to follow the child.

Poppy Rena went straight to the field. No poppies were in bloom. She went to look at her box and see if it were safe. Poppy Rena opened it in the moonlight, took its contents out, and held them in her arms. Bertha stared and was frightened for the child. The box was filled with candles. Poppy Rena had been stealing candles from the church.

Bertha went home before Poppy Rena did. She said nothing to the child.

But a greater anxiety and fear had filled her heart. Why was the child stealing the candles from the church?

"Mother, what's the matter? You don't look happy." Poppy Rena was standing in the doorway. Under her arm was a basket filled with dandelion greens she had picked for supper.

"I was just thinking how lonely I'd be if you ever went away from me."

Poppy Rena set the basket on the table. She smiled. "Why are you afraid? Don't you know that I can never leave you? I'll always be with you even if I'm not here. That's the way it is if you love somebody."

"You're a strange child." Bertha took Poppy Rena in her lap.

"Of course I am." Poppy Rena laughed.

Bertha thought, "I've been lucky to have you for three years. I've been very happy. I could have you with me for

a life time, except for those candles. When I saw those candles, I don't know why, but I was afraid again that you would leave me when the poppies bloom---and those words I'll always be with you even if I'm not here? Don't leave me, Poppy Rena. I'll be alone." "What are you thinking about?" she said aloud.

"Will you light a candle in the church for me if I die, Mother."

"What a thing to say. You're much too young to talk of dying."

"I said, if I die, will you light a candle?"

"Of course. Now no more talk of candles and dying. Look at the dandelion greens still on the table. We better start cooking them for supper. They won't taste so nice if you talk of dying. What a child!"

Poppy Rena laughed. "I love you, Mother."

Bertha laughed, too. "That's better. Come, let's get to work. Now, you fetch the water, and I'll select the best leaves. That's the way. I like to hear you laugh. Now, I'm happy." But in her heart she was thinking, "Until the poppies bloom."

Easter came again. Time passes and not all the wishing and praying in the world can stop it. Today is winter and tomorrow is the spring. Today is life, tomorrow death. That's the way it seemed to Bertha.

Easter evening came, and everyone went to church for

the service. The church was lovely at Easter---more candles than there ever were before. The joy in Poppy Rena's eyes and the fear in Bertha's heart, the old fear of being left alone, were in the church, too, that night.

"The church should always be like this---bright with candlelight. There shouldn't be nights when it's dark. Everything is so beautiful in the candlelight," the child said. "They should always keep the candlelight." Bertha said nothing.

After the service Bertha lost Poppy Rena in the crowd. Everyone was going home to feast and the church warden was putting the candles out. "I saw her running up the mountain. She was going home," an old woman said.

Up the mountain? Bertha rushed to the poppy field and to the small, rough rock. There she found the box on the ground, but the candles were gone. The child was hiding somewhere in the church waiting for everyone to leave.

It was too late when Bertha got back to the village. The church was in flames. A crowd had gathered.

"It was Bertha's child. I saw it. The little demon set fire to the church."

"Who set the church on fire? What happened?"

"Bertha's child set fire to the church."

"I saw her go in with an armful of candles. I didn't know or I would have stopped her."

"What do you suppose she did it for?"

"It was an accident. No one would burn a church down on purpose. Not if they loved it as much as that child did."

"How do you know?"

"Do you suppose she's still in there burning with the church?"

"Who knows?"

"Oh, God," Bertha cried, "she only wanted to keep the church bright with candlelight. She loved the candles. She thought they were beautiful. She only wanted to light a candle."

"I tell you I saw her in the poppy field fifty years ago. I wanted to play with her, but she laughed and ran away. I remember the strange blue eyes she had."

A strange blue, a little deeper than the sky. Eyes that loved to laugh and wonder. "Poppy Rena come back." Bertha tried to run into the burning church, but the crowd held her back, and the church burned down without her.

"She only wanted to light the candles," Bertha said.

Poppy Rena was never seen again. The poppies bloomed at Eastertime and Poppy Rena went away.

Some of the people burned the poppy field. They heard how her dress and hair had not been wet by the rain. They felt she was a demon for only a demon would burn down a church.

A few thought the gypsies had brought her and the gypsies had taken her away. The burning of the church was an

accident. It could have been a candle that the church warden forgot to extinguish. These few didn't believe in demons and furthermore they didn't believe what people said they thought they saw.

Others just wondered.

Bertha said nothing. No one knew what she believed. They only knew she had loved and lived for the child.

So Bertha was left alone again and she moved away to the mountains near Mistra where no one knew her. Bertha found she was lonelier than she had ever been before. She took care of her sheep in the daytime and slept alone at night.

But soon the loneliness left her. She found that what Poppy Rena had said was true. She couldn't forget Poppy Rena, and the child was with her every minute in the sunlight, moonlight, rain, and flowers. The child was still real within her heart. The old fear of losing her was gone now. Bertha wasn't really lonely any more. That's the way it is if you love somebody. They're always with you.

This was especially true at Eastertime when Bertha lit the candle in the church. Then it was more real, and Poppy Rena stood beside her again in her thin white dress with the yellow sash and watched the candlelight and smiled again with her blue eyes like the blue in Bertha's poppy-bowl---a strange blue, a little deeper than the sky.

# CANDELÁKI (A TALE)

Old Rya carefully poured more of the yellow oil into the small white glass half-filled with water which was her ikon light, her candeláki. The thin taper wick was floating on the oil and was bright with the thin flaming end, jutting from the oil, reaching toward the darkness above the glass with its light. Rya watched the thin line of oil swell as she poured and she watched the taper rise upon it while the light around the flame spread and touched the orange faces of the saints in Rya's ikon. Slowly Rya blessed herself. Slowly, reverently, she kneeled and touched her forehead to the floor. Rya rose and listened to the wind against the window glass and her lips kissed the pale hands of St. George in the ikon.

"The wind is a dragon tonight," Rya said. She moved to the window and stared at the cave on the hill beyond the decaying bridge of old wood. She stared at the cave and smiled-only her lips smiled. Her eyes were thinking of the reflection of the candeláki in the shine of the window pane. The reflection was caught in the shadows of the opening to the cave; and sometimes it seemed as if the light were really in the cave, shining in the blackness, held perhaps by Mahki's hand, strong Mahki who had stepped into the cave almost fifty years before and had never come back to Mistra.

Old Rya nodded. "The wind is a dragon tonight and is

moving in the cave like the ghost of a dragon, moving around to find Mahki." She smiled again and pushed her soft teeth together.

Rya listened to the wind which was knocking at her door. It heaved against the wooden boards and knocked. Old Rya listened.

"Old Rya," the wind was saying. "Old Rya, are you at home?" But old Rya was guiet, waiting.

"No. No, that is not the wind," she said at last and walked to the door and put her white hand on the doorknob. "Who is it?" Rya asked. "What is it you want?"

"Old Rya," the voice said. "Let me in, I must speak to you. It is Panayota from the village."

Rya opened the door as the wind pushed against it to keep it shut. "What is it you want?"

Panayota stood there in the night. She opened her mouth to speak. A braid of her hair had been twisted by the wind and the strands were loose and bits of the hair were blown against her tongue as she tried to talk. She stood there while the wind was blowing and said nothing until her fingers moved to touch old Rya's hand. "Old Rya," she said. "Help me." And the words were quiet, almost unspoken.

Rya nearly pushed Panayota's hands away.

"Please---" Deeper and deeper stared her eyes, deep into the blue of Rya's eyes. "They told me you are not afraid of the cave. You are the only one who is not afraid."

Rya tried to move her eyes from Panayota's face.

"Please---" Panayota touched old Rya's dress. "Maryula is in there, in the cave. My little girl."

Rya smiled. "The little girl who brings me dandelion greens and daisies from the mountain. Why has she gone into the cave?"

"She came to me this morning and told me she heard music in there when she passed. A man, she said it was."

"A man singing---"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"He was singing about a gold cross on a church and loneliness." Rya's face was still. It was like the clear water of a lake which the wind has stopped touching---quiet and alone, as if the wind had never been there and would never come again.

"No," Panayota said. "Not a cross. A candeláki. Maryula said he wanted a candeláki and he asked whoever listened to him to bring him one tonight."

"Tonight and fifty years ago Mahki left Mistra. Mahki went into the cave."

"Please---" Panayota whispered. "I am afraid for Maryula. I'm afraid for my child. I want you to take me into the cave to find my child."

"No," Rya said. "I cannot do that. I cannot take anyone into the cave---" But the light was slipping from Panayota's face and leaving behind the hard, set mask of

passiveness that hardens into the faces of those who have lost, are losing, hopeless, yet firm perhaps in knowing that in waiting or in sacrificing all they shall be winning after all. Panayota would go in alone to find her child. "I'll go," old Rya said. "I'll go into the cave myself. I must not take anyone with me. You stay here and pray in front of my candeláki. And I'll go in to find your child for you."

There were no tears on Panayota's face. There was no smile. She touched old Rya's wrinkled hands once more and passed to kneel before old Rya's candelaki and to pray.

And Rya walked into the night, pushing against the wind, moving toward the entrance to the cave.

"It's been fifty years," the wind said. "Fifty years. They say that Mahki still is there, alive, unchanged---the years have pushed no lines across his cheeks nor tightened his skin." Or maybe old Rya said the words herself in her mind. Maybe she dreamed that Panayota came to her and touched her hand. But Panayota was still kneeling before the ikon and old Rya could see her through the window pane.

Old Rya listened as she neared the cave. Maryula had heard a man's voice singing. "Maryula," old Rya called. But there was no sound and there was no answering flicker of Maryula's candeláki. Rya lit the small lump of wax candle in her hands and walked into the cave.

She thought of Mahki as she walked. She thought of candles in the church at Easter and Mahki's face bright among

the candles. "Mahki," old Rya whispered. "Listen, Mahki, I've been afraid to come into the cave. I've been afraid to come to you, to talk to you." The memory came back into her mind and Rya spoke words and remembered and relived what had happened fifty years before.....

...Easter morning...when the new gold cross was ready for the church. Easter morning and a blue sky and a new gold cross for the church steeple, a cross to bring it nearer to the sky. Mahki smiled at Rya as he held the cross within his hands. "They want me to take it to the steeple, Rya," he had said. "Me: a goatherd. They say my heart is clean like a child's. They want me to carry the cross." And Mahki smiled at all the people. "You've made me very happy," Mahki said. And Mahki climbed the steeple as the people watched and Mahki put the cross there with his hands. Then perhaps it was the sunlight on the gold that pushed into his eyes and Mahki's fingers slid from round the cross and Mahki fell. Rya had prayed all night before the candeláki, prayed for him to live. And Mahki lived, but his legs were twisted and his back was crooked and one side of his mouth was caught in a thin moon smile that never moved.

"I love you, Mahki. Your eyes are still beautiful. Your heart is still like a child's--" Rya touched her fingers to her face and remembered. Mahki's heart had not changed with his body unless it was perhaps to grow a little kinder. But strange things happened in the village. A part of the church burn

church burned in a thunderstorm and it was because Mahki had looked at it. A baby died on the mountain because Mahki had smiled at it. The cross that Mahki had put on the steeple at Easter time cracked and crumbled from the church. "I love you, Mahki," Rya said. "And we must go from here.....We must leave Mistra. My father will not let me see you any more. He is afraid." But Mahki touched her face and said, "Not yet, Rya." And they would meet in the cave and Rya would bring her candelaki....

"Mahki," old Rya whispered. "I've been afraid to come to you, to talk to you." Old Rya whispered and remembered and was no longer afraid. Her bony feet shuffled through the dust of the cave and the old blue of her eyes stared for Maryula's candelaki. She listened in the darkness. Then ahead of her she saw the small flame moving. "Maryula," she called. "This way, Maryula." But Maryula turned further into the cave and Rya heard the sound of a foot rattling against loose rock and heard Maryula scream. "Maryula!" Old Rya ran to the child and saw her standing above the crooked, twisted bones of a man. Maryula stood there, eyes wide, mouth and face quivering.

"Ma-ma," Maryula whispered. "Ma-ma."

"It's me. Old Rya." Rya put her arms around the child and turned her face away from the bones on the floor and pressed the child's face against the warm, dry, comforting smell of her breasts. "Come, Maryula. Your mother is wait-

ing." And slowly, carefully, old Rya led the child from the cave into the living briskness of the mountain wind.

"Someone killed him," Maryula said. "There was a knife. I saw it."

"Nonsense, child. You're tired. It's late and time for you to sleep and you were dreaming with your eyes awake."

"I was dreaming?"

"Of course you were. There's nothing in that cave but darkness."

"There was nothing there?"

"Nothing there."

Maryula pushed herself inside the curl of Rya's arm. "I believe you, Rya. There was nothing there. It was all a dream, wasn't it?"

"That's right, child. A dream."

"The wind was talking to old Rya again and only her ears could hear. "The wind is a dragon tonight," the wind said. "And Mahki's lying in the cave where your father found him."

"Yes," old Rya whispered. "It is good the years have passed and I am not afraid. Mahki is alive in me---I am not afraid."

"What did you say, old Rya?"

"Nothing, child." She lifted Maryula in her arms and whispered in her hair "I will carry you and we will get home faster. The wind is cold on my arms. And see, see down there through the window. Your mother is waiting for you,

praying by the candelaki."

"A child, old Rya," the wind whispered. "A child. You might have had a child."

But even that had crumbled with the fear and there was no more ache inside her. Even that did not seem to matter any more. "Yes," old Rya whispered to the wind and smiled. "It is good the years have passed."

## PETRO AND HIS FLUTE

### A Greek Tale

They say that the treetops in Lacadaemon caught some of the music from Petro's flute with their leaves, and sometimes, when the wind moves them and there is rain on the mountain, it is as if Petro were alive again sitting in the branches of the trees, laughing, and playing his flute. And sometimes when the wind blows the leaves and bends them to the ground, when there are needles in the rain and the streams swell until they burst against the mountain rocks and fall to the valleys, Petro cries alone on the mountain and looks for his lamb, Kalessí.

Not many of the people in Mistra remember Petro and his flute. They have forgotten about his lamb, too, and his goat. But they still remember the silver box----

"It's somewhere on the mountain--that box. It's waiting for someone to find it."

"It's gone, I tell you. The mountain streams have taken it away."

"You'll see. Someone will find it some day. Hand carved it is--and made of silver."

"I'd be afraid to touch it. They say the devil was locked inside it once. No good can come from a box like that."

"Just the same--"

The people still remember the box and they look for it

sometimes when they climb the mountain with their goats, but they have forgotten how the box came and that the box once belonged to Petro. They have forgotten Petro.

The cherries were on the trees in the church garden when the people in Mistra first saw Petro. He was running through the village with a baby goat in his arms and crying.

"Hey, little boy," Yria called to him. It was almost noon, and she was on her way home from the spring with an urn full of water. "What are you crying about? Are you lost?" Petro tried to run past her, but Yria turned and Petro bumped against her apron and her legs. She caught Petro's arm and held the tearing sleeve of his sweater when he pulled the arm away. Some of the water from the urn spilled and wet Yria's dress.

"No - No - Let me go." Petro leaned his face against the goat's back. "Please let me go."

"What's the matter with you?" Yria pulled him towards her. "Crying down the village street as if the Devil's after you. Bumping against an old woman and spilling her water. I'm not going to eat you." Yria leaned a little closer to the white baby goat and Petro's face. "Look at all the people watching you. Shame on you. Stop crying and let me help you."

"Please - please - please - Let me go."

"Do you think I'm going to eat you? Stop wiggling and look at me. Where are you running to with a goat that is

almost as big as you are?"

"It's my goat."

"Yours?"

"I have to hide it."

"Hide it? Is that where you were going? Why do you have to hide the goat if it's yours?"

"It is my goat. It is. Let go of me."

"I believe you. It's your goat."

"It's my goat."

"Now, why are you crying? Is the goat sick?"

"The man's going to sell it--the man who sold its mother. He's going to sell my goat."

"Oh--"

The goat's legs stuck down, and the goat moved in Petro's arms.

"I have to hide it."

"You can hide it in my cellar." Yria was looking at Petro's eyes. She was going to smile until she saw his eyes--round they were, and dark. They were looking at the little knobs on the goat's head where the horns would grow. There was no room in his eyes for anything but the goat. "He probably doesn't know how to get home again," she thought.

"In your cellar?"

"It'll be safe there for a little while. You can eat some bread and cheese at my house. Aren't you hungry?" Petro walked along with Yria. "I had a rooster when I was

little," Yria told him. "They wanted to sell him, too, and I wouldn't let them, but they sold him anyway."

"Did you hide him?"

"Yes. But they found him."

"They won't find *my* goat. I won't let them."

"WhatIs your name? I haven't seen you in the village before."

"Petro."

Panayota's son. Panayota had two sons, Nicola and Petro. She had gone to Corinth, lived there, had two sons, and had come back a month ago to die in Mistra.

"You have a brother named Nicola?"

Petro nodded. "He's big."

Nicola had bought hens in Mistra. Nicola had no goats. He had no money to buy goats--unless some one gave them to him.

"It's afraid. That's why. They took its mother away."

"Let me carry it for you."

"I can carry it." He tugged forward, and the sleeve of his sweater tore a little more. "Come on. Before they find it."

They were almost to Yria's house when one of the goatherds from the mountain saw them and shouted to Yria. Nicola was with him. "Hold him. Hold him tight, Yria. Don't let him go," the goatherd said.

Petro screamed and pulled away from Yria and left the

piece of sweater in her hands. The goat was heavier in Petro's arms, and its legs dangled lower.

"Stop the thief. Stop him." The goatherd ran after Petro. "He stole my goat."

The goat's legs dangled now until they almost touched the ground. Petro was running and trying to lift the goat higher. But Petro stopped. His arms could not carry the goat any more. He sat down in the dust and hugged it in his lap.

"Petro--," Nicola said. Yria stopped him as he moved past her.

"Hey - Nicola. Stop a minute. Here is a piece of Petro's sleeve." Nicola took the torn brown cloth and looked at Yria. "Don't hurt him," Yria said.

"Never mind," Nicola said. "I'll teach him not to steal."

The goatherd was shaking Petro and trying to lift him from the goat he was hugging. "Let it go, you thief."

Petro hugged the goat tighter.

"You'll kill it."

"Give the man his goat, Petro," Nicola said.

"It's *my* goat."

"*His* goat?" More of the people had gathered. The goatherd talked to the people. "He says it's *his* goat. *His?*"

"All this noise over an old goat."

"It's a baby goat."

"Why don't you give it to the boy?"

"A goat from my best stock--give it away?"

"It's *my* goat."

"Petro, give the man his goat. It belongs to him. You stole it."

Yria touched Petro's arm. "Listen to your brother, Petro. Give the goat back."

"It's *your* fault," Petro said. "It's mine. God gave it to me. I prayed for a lamb and a baby goat. *God* gave it to me."

"*God* gave it to you?"

"God gave you *my* goat? The Devil made you steal it, you mean."

"It was crying because you sold its mother. I found it when you lost it. Nicola made me bring it back. It's mine. You don't love it."

"It's my property."

"It doesn't want you. It wants me."

"Make him give me the goat, Nicola, before I beat him here in the street."

"Leave the child alone, you." Yria moved her face close to the goatherd. "And you, too," she said to Nicola. "If I had the money, I'd buy the animal and give it to the child." She put her hand on Petro's head. "Get up, you," she told him. "Stop crying and listen to me. Get up and come with me to the church. "We'll see if the priest says

God gave him the goat."

"The priest?" Petro opened his eyes.

"Suppose the man here is right and it was the Devil--not God-who gave it to you, eh?"

"Come on, Petro," Nicola said. "I won't hurt you. Let's go to the priest."

"Suppose the priest---"

"Quiet, you." Yria pushed her elbow against the goatherd's arm. "Petro will do what the priest says, won't you?"

Petro nodded.

"Good boy," Yria said.

So they went out of the village---Yria, Nicola, the goatherd, Petro and the goat. They walked up the mountain to the church named Panayia. "I didn't know the church was here," Petro said.

The priest was sitting in the garden under one of the cherry trees. He was eating cherries and he was carving a flute out of light brown wood. His beard was red and pointed. His eyebrows were thick and red, and some of the ends of the hair on them curled upward to his forehead. Petro looked at his beard and at his brown eyes that were wide and untired and had some of the orange and yellow from a lighted fire caught in them. Father Elia closed his eyes and thought a long while before he talked to Petro.

"Give the man the goat, Petro," he said. "God has something else for you." He smiled. Petro watched the beard

move as he talked. "You are Panayota's son and He is giving you a flute. See---here---I am making it for you; and here we'll carve a goat, and here a lamb. They will be very little, but they will be dancing. Give the man the goat. That's the boy. Petro, you sit here and help me make this flute. You will be the bird that sings - You'll see what music will come from this flute. Even the wind will stop to listen when you sing. Here. You can hold it a while."

Petro stood holding the goat with one hand and the unmade flute with the other. "The priest knows what's right, Petro," Yria said.

Father Elia looked at the cherries in his lap. Then he looked at the goatherd's frowning mouth. "The boy is lonely," the priest said. "Go home now and forgive him for wanting the goat and the goat for wanting him.

"Petro, give the man the goat. He's selling it to the man who bought its mother. You don't want to keep it from its mother, do you? Didn't you know that the mother cried so much that the man had to buy this one, too?"

Petro shook his head.

"Here, Petro. Take the flute. I'll show you how to play it the way your mother did when she was little. Here are some cherries to eat. Sit down with me. You can come for him, Nicola, when you feel there is just enought time to get him home before the night comes on the mountain."

So Petro stayed with the priest and learned to play the

flute. "You know, Petro, God has given you a great gift," the priest told him.

"It's like a bird," Petro said. "I'll sit in the tree and be a bird."

"Even the birds will listen when you play."

"Did my mother play a flute, too, when she was little?"

Father Elia nodded. His big hand held the flute. "She and I played the flute together."

"When you were little?"

The priest pushed against his forehead with his hand---"Are these wrinkles, Petro?" He laughed. "I'm still little."

Petro sat on the ground and stared at the priest's hand. "I want my mother," Petro whispered. "Why won't God give me back my Mother." He pushed his fists into the soft earth and lay down to cry against the ground. "I want my Mother."

And the priest talked to Petro and took him into the church. Father Elia showed Petro the ikon of Panayia. "Your Mother lives with her now, Petro. Panayia is the mother of all the people on the earth." Petro looked into her eyes and nodded. "She watches over all of us. She understands everything." The church warden with the stooped back was putting oil in the altar lights.

Petro nodded again. "My mother told me about her."

"Here's a candle, Petro. Light it for Panayia," Father Elia said. Petro lit the candle and stared up into the ikon's face. The candle flame was moving and making shadows on her

face. It was as if Panayia smiled at Petro. Her eyes filled with light, then with shadow. It was as if Panayia were talking to him without words and Petro understood. "Some day I'll have something beautiful to give you," he said, and Father Elia smiled.

The cherries dropped from the trees in the church yard until the branches held only the thin leaves. Petro leaned against the shining branches and played his flute. Nicola worked hard on the mountain while Petro played. "It's a shame," one of the village women told him. "Nicola, it's a shame. It's that priest's fault. The boy whould be working. It's no good for a boy to know nothing about the world but the sound of a flute. It's no good, I tell you."

Yria leaned her head on her left shoulder and looked up into the woman's face. "Mind your business, old Woman. The boy is working. He thinks he can make the cherries grow again with his music. Leave him alone."

"The half-wit son of Panayota thinks he can make the cherries grow."

"Leave the boy alone," Yria said. "He's harming no one."

"Yria is right. Listen to the way his flute sings. We have a new bird on the mountain."

"He should be helping his brother work."

"It's all right," Nicola said quietly. "I like to hear Petro play."

The music was like a seed the wind carries. It blew

along the mountain side, through the grasses, against the rocks: and the people listened. When the cherries came, Petro laughed. Then he went to the pastures on the mountains to make the goats dance. "Listen. The half-wit sons of Panayota is playing his flute."

"Play us a song, Petro. One we can dance to."

Petro laughed and climbed a tree and leaned his back and head against its wood. Living was not easy on the mountain. The herds worked hard. And there was no rest at night from the fear of the wolves. At night the wind was cold. But when Petro played, the herds danced. For a little while there was nothing on the earth but a thin piping sound that moved around the air and stretched the lonely smile inside a person out to where it snapped and broke into laughter. "When Petro plays, we have to dance," the goatherds said. "Eh, Petro?"

"Watch out," Petro told them. "Someday I'll make your sheep and goats dance, too. And they won't ever want to stop."

"Like you, eh, Petro?"

"Just like me."

And one day when Petro was going to the church to help the church warden light the candles and dust the ikons, he made a lamb dance. It was the Holy Day of Panayia, and the people were on their way to the church. He was walking along the mountain path making the grass bend and the leaves turn with his music. Yria was sitting beside the roadway resting

on her way to church and fanning the air around her mouth with her big hands. "The sun is too hot for the old people today, Petro," she said. "Stop and play your flute a while. Aeolus must have hidden his bags of air inside you. Where do you get the breath to play that flute day after night. You never stop."

Petro laughed. "Yes, I do."

Her big hand brushed a black fly from the hair on her arm. She looked into his round eyes to see the answer as she spoke. Her eyes narrowed. "Have you ever forgiven me for the baby goat, eh, Petro?"

Petro's lips opened and something inside his eyes closed.

"I heard you praying in the church one night--"

Petro nodded.

"You were asking your mother for a baby sheep or a goat like the one Yria made them catch you with."

Petro was turning the flute in his fingers and smiling a little.

"A flute is not enough, eh, Petro?"

Petro was closing his toes around the grass.

"I know a flute is not enough," Yria said. "So I talked to Panayia after you left, and she told me she will give you a lamb today here by the path to the church."

"She talked to you--"

Yria nodded. "Today is her name day and she wants to give you a gift."

"Me?"

"She loves you very much."

Petro stood there closing his toes around the grass and looking at Yria.

"Well, go on and play, child. See if the lamb will come the way the cherries did."

Petro slowly put the flute against his lips. Only a little whisper of breath moved through.

"Go on," Yria said. "Don't be afraid."

Petro played and the lamb came. It came from the bushes near the walnut grove beside the church. It jumped into the air and hardly touched the grass as it leaped. "Maa-aa," the lamb said.

"Don't stop, Petro. The lamb is dancing. See." Yria's hands moved faster against the air. Petro played, afraid to stop, as if the magic would end when the music stopped and the lamb would not be there. His eyes were wide, afraid to close or laugh or cry. They were holding the vision of the lamb jumping in the grass around him.

"It's real, Petro." Yria laughed. "Don't be afraid." Pætro was crying, but he still played. "What a child. His dream comes true and he doesn't laugh." Her hands spread open in her lap and she smiled. What a child."

But Petro didn't hear. He watched the lamb dance until the flute was quiet. Then he watched the lamb bite the grass with its teeth and stay beside him. "It's real," Petro said.

"Really real."

"It's yours," Yria nodded.

"Mine," Petro said.

That night Petro walked past the walnut trees into the church where the people were waiting for the service praising Panayia to begin. Petro walked as if he did not know the people were there. He carried the lamb in his arms and the flute in his left hand and walked up to the ikon of Panayia beside the altar doorway in front of all the people. The candles were shining on Panayia's face. "Me and Kalessi come to thank you," he said. Petro put the lamb down. "Ma--aa," Kalessi said and looked at the people. Petro played his flute and Kalessi jumped against the boards on the church floor and the altar lights trembled.

"Petro!" Nicola shouted.

"What is the boy doing?" Someone said.

"Leave the boy alone," Yria was saying.

"Sacrilege," an old woman whispered.

"The half-wit son of Panayota is making fun of the Holy Mother."

"Get him out."

"Someone get him away from there."

"Leave him alone."

"A lamb dancing in the church to that Devil's music in his flute. It's no good, I tell you."

"The child knows no better."

Meanwhile the church warden with the crooked back tried to catch the lamb, but the lamb's feet were too quick for his wrinkled hands. So he shook Petro and tried to pull him out of the church when Father Elia came in from the walnut grove and the garden where he walked alone before the service. The church warden was holding Petro's flute and Petro was kicking him in the legs. "Give it back," Petro was shouting.

"A sacrilege, Father," the old woman said.

Father Elia did not laugh. The ends of his red beard moved. He walked to the steps before the altar doorway and spread his arms as he smiled at the people. The shouting stopped and the people watched the priest, but the whispering and talking was still loud.

"Let the boy go," he told the warden. Petro was crying and the warden was going to snap the flute in his hands.

"No - No -" Petro reached for the warden's fingers.

"Give the flute to the boy," Father Elia said.

The talking was softer and the people listened to what the priest said. Petro took the flute. Kalessi was moving his head against Petro's legs. Petro turned to run out of the church.

"Come here, Petro," Father Elia told him. Petro waited. "Don't be afraid."

Petro looked at the people who were watching him. He shook his head and looked at the floor. "No," Petro tried to say. The silence in the church pushed against him.

"Come here, Petro," Father Elia said again and smiled. Petro moved toward him pushed by the silence of the people. "What are you doing in the church tonight with the lamb and the flute?"

"I wanted to thank her. Panayia. For giving me Kalessi."

"The people think you were making fun of Panayia."

It was hard for Petro to speak. The words were like little shrieks. "She gave me Kallessi. I love her."

"You weren't making fun?"

"No. I *love* her."

"All right, Petro. I understand," the priest said. "Only next time ask me to help you when you want to thank Panayia. Not everybody understands the way we do."

Petro nodded. He was shaking, but there were no tears. The tears came when he was out of the church, away from the people, when he was alone with Kalessi under the walnut trees near the church yard where he could hear the people singing to Panayia in the church. "Petro." Yria was calling him, but Petro was quiet in the trees' shadows and Yria went back into the church without him. "Kallessi," Petro cried. "You know. You came from there. You saw my mother, too. Tell me, do you think Panayia understands?" The lamb was asleep, and Petro thought he heard Father Elia's voice whispering with the breath from the sleeping lamb--"Panayia is the mother of all of us. She loves you. She understands." Father Elia understands. Yria understands. Only the people do not al-

ways understnad. The tears were gone, and Petro fell asleep with his head against Kalessi's back

Many days passed and Petro danced on the mountain with his lamb. Kalessi jumped ahead as they danced, always ahead, so Petro could watch him. Petro was happy with Kalessi. "See," he would shout to the herds. "Watch my Kalessi dance."

Where did you get such a lamb?"

And Petro would laugh and his eyes would grow rounder. "He came from the air when I played my flute. Panayia gave him to me." And the herds counted their flocks many times to make sure no lamb was missing.

"Do you think it really came from the air like the half-wit says?"

"It didn't come from any sheep in these mountains."

"It had to come from somewhere."

"Do you know what they're saying?"

"What?"

"It's no good, I tell you."

"What are they saying?"

"The lamb changes into a demon at night with yellow eyes and watches Petro."

"Don't you talk about my lamb that way. He woke me up once when a snake was going to bite me."

"Maa-aa," said the lamb.

So Petro and Kalessi danced and played together. The

days passed. Father Elia smiled when Petro played for a few minutes to the cherry trees to make the cherries come again. "Why do the cherries go away?" Petro would ask.

"So they can grow again," Father Elia would answer. "So there can be more cherry trees."

And each day Petro would help the church warden with the stooped back as he dusted the ikons, swept the church, and poured new oil for the altar lights. The church warden did not talk at all.

"Why don't you ever talk?" Petro asked him once.

It seemed as if the bent back stooped a little more and his brown eyes looked smaller. "Because I have nothing to say," the church warden said. He was setting new candles in the silver holders. Petro watched the way his thin fingers touched the silver and the candles, as if the metal and the wax were real. He touched the velvet on the benches and the old carved walnut wood of the benches and the doors as if his hands could feel the breath inside them.

The days passed and the spring was coming. The wind felt new. Petro breathed the wind and felt full enough to fly, but whenever he jumped his feet would touch the grass or dust again instead of air. It seemed that Kalessi, too, needed earth to jump from. "We're going high on the mountain," he told Father Elia. "Higher than we've ever been before."

Father Elia leaned against one of the walnut trees

with his elbow. "Be careful of the rivers, Petro. They come down the mountain sides too fast for you to run ahead of them. They're not gentle either. They'll smash you against the rocks and roll you along with the stones in their path."

"We'll be careful."

Petro and Kalessi climbed to see what the rivers looked like when they started to come down the mountain. "They seem to suddenly flow as if they're being poured from the air," Yria had told him. "You'll see."

They were not even halfway on the mountain when Petro heard a river rolling down from above them. "Kalessi!" Petro shouted. But Kalessi was standing at the edge of the mountain brook with his nose in the water. "Come away from there." And Petro ran to catch him in his arms, but Kalessi had his feet in the water and was walking to the earth on the other side and Petro was too far behind to get to the brook before the river fell. "Run, Kalessi!" Petro screamed. "Run--" And Kalessi jumped. Kalessi and Petro were safe with the rusing water between them. Petro was trembling. The water was too fast for Petro to walk through.

"Wait for me, Kalessi," Petro shouted, and he found a safe place to cross further on the mountain. When he got to the other side, Kalessi was gone. "Don't be afraid, Kalessi," Petro said. "I'll find you." But Petro could not find him anywhere, not on the pastures, or in any of the

caves, or behind the bushes and trees, or by any of the streams. Petro looked down the chasms where the mountain rock had separated, but Kalessi wasn't there. Petro even played his flute for Kalessi to come and dance, but Kalessi did not hear. It was almost morning when Father Elia found Petro waiting by the stream where he had lost Kalessi. Petro was asleep. The priest carried him back to the church.

"Suppose he came," Petro cried when he woke. "Suppose he came and didn't find me there. A wolf will eat him, he's so little--He doesn't know the way home without me." Petro prayed to Panayia to help him find Kalessi. He waited by the stream and played his flute. And the music that he played fell back from the air and made a silver box as long as a child's arm and as deep as an egg basket. First, the silver came and shaped a box. Then as Petro played, the silver became carved and molded. The more he played, the more intricately carved the box became; and on it in carving was the love of Petro for Kalessi. And it seemed to Petro as if his mother were there in front of him smiling and shaping the box with her hands as he played. "Give the box to Panayia, Petro. Then go back in forty days to find out about Kalessi. I love you, Petro." she said. Petro tried to hold her with him with his music, but she went away when the box was finished. Petro thought the box would go away, too, when he touched it - but the box was real.

It was night when Petro took the box in his hands and started to the church. On the way. Petro had to pass a lane of cypress trees where the Devil sometimes danced at night. Petro blessed himself and watched the shadows on the grass as he walked. They moved with the wind. And one of them changed from the shadow of a tree to that of a man dancing. It was a trick the wind played, and the shadows. The wind had a voice, too. It laughed at Petro. "Ha-Ha, Petro. Ha-Ha Petro," went the sing-song of the wind. Petro looked up at the tree that seemed to dance and saw a tall man with black holes for eyes and with broken, twisted bones in his long hands. Petro was quiet---"Don't ever speak if you see a demon on the mountain at night, or he'll take your voice away." Yria had told him. Petro could not move to run away.

"I know where your lamb is,Petro. I know where Kalessi is. Don't you want to know where?"

Petro nodded.

The grinning mouth laughed again. It laughed like the split screams of birds when they are afraid. Then it laughed a low laugh like the sound of the wind leaving a tree's branches. "I won't tell you, Petro. I won't ever tell you."

Petro put the flute against his lips and started to walk past the Devil who reached out toward him with his broken hands. Petro played faster and the Devil smiled. "Play. Petro, and I'll dance, the way Kalessi used to dance." Petro played and the Devil could not stop dancing. He mocked

Kalessi and leaped from the grass lightly as if the grass were air. Then he whirled and leaped until he almost burst into flames. The black holes of his eyes never left Petro's face. Then, as suddenly as he began, the Devil stopped dancing. He fell to the ground and was sound asleep.

Petro kept on playing and the Devil shrank until he was just big enough to fit into the silver box. Petro took a stick and pushed and lifted the Devil inside. Then he locked the box and took it to the church.

Some of the people from the village were sitting in the garden and talking to Father Elia when Petro came.

"Look at the child," Yria said. "Blink your eyes a little, Petro. He looks as if he's seen the Devil himself tonight."

"I have. I made him dance. He's in this box."

"What's the half-wit saying?"

"Petro," Father Elia said. "Where did you get that silver box?"

"My mother made it for me from the music in my flute."

"What in the name of Heaven is wrong with the child? Is he insane?"

"Let me see it, Petro?"

Father Elia looked at the carved figures of a little boy fluting from the branches of a tree while a lamb danced. "Maybe he's telling the truth," Father Elia whispered.

"It's the job of a priest to believe in miracles, Father.

But to sponsor a thief with them---"

"Quiet, you!" Yria moved her head to accent the words as she spoke. "You who are always ready to condemn, prove first that Peter is lying. Find the owner of the box. Search the country for him. The owner of such a fine box will not be hard to find, if he exists. Then sell us your talk about thieves."

"The box is for Panayia," Petro said. "So she'll give me back my lamb."

So Petro gave Panayia what she wanted most of all, no more evil among the people, because the Devil was locked tight in a box of silver made from the music in Petro's flute.

And there was no more evil in the village. At first no one believed Petro about the Devil in the box. Soon the people began to wonder. A robber passing through Mistra found out about the money hiding in an egg basket in Nicola's house. But when the time came to steal, the robber saw how Nicola had been working to earn enough money to buy a goat and the robber could not close his hands around the coins. Another man had been waiting a long time to slay his neighbor. He hid himself in the bushes along the mountain path to kill him when he passed. But the neighbor was singing and carrying his child on his shoulders, and the slayer broke the knife's blade against a rock instead. The people in the village became friends. Doors were left unlocked and people shared their laughter as well as their food. Many days passed

and

and Father Elia began to think that what Petro said about the Devil was true. He hid the key to the box behind the ikon of Panayia. He should have melted it instead and thrown the metal back into the earth and air.

The church warden saw where Father Elia put the key. Each day he dusted the silver box and touched it with his fingers. The Devil was still asleep inside. One day when the church warden was tracing his fingers over the silver carvings, he thought he heard a noise inside. The Devil was banging against the box with his feet and crooked hands and yelling - "Let me out. Let me out of here."

"I'm getting old," the warden said. "It's easy to hear things that aren't real."

"Let me out," the Devil shouted. "Whoever you are. Let me out of here. I'll give you anything you want?"

"Anything?"

"You heard me. Please, let me out. Take me to the cypress grove and let me out of this box."

"You'll give me anything?"

"Anything."

"All right," the warden said. He took the key from behind the ikon and he lifted the box and carried it in his trembling hands out from the church up to the cypress trees where he let the Devil out. The Devil stretched his legs until they were as long as a man's again. He grew and looked at the warden.

"Well, what is this anything you set me free for! I always keep my bargains.

The warden spoke more words than he had said for many years. "I want wealth," the warden said. "I want a cave of treasures and a rich house and velvets and fine candles. I want rich clothes and a black horse to ride on. I want these things to last all my life."

The Devil laughed. "Easily done. You could have asked for much more," he said.. "Look there--" and beside the cyrpess trees stood a house like the one the warden dreamed of. The old clothes were gone from his body, and he wore a green velvet suit with silver threaded embroidery. The old man laughed. His laugh was like the sudden rumbling of a mountain stream in the spring. The Devil let him laugh.

When he stopped, the Devil said, "But no one can see this wealth but yourself, you know. Even if people come to the grove, they will see nothing, and, if they look closely, they will see only a wooden hut with torn shingles and no glass for window panes. And they will wonder at the crazy old man who lives inside it." The Devil laughed at the old man's open mouth. "Thank you, old man, for setting me free."

The box was gone from the church and the Devil was alive again. The robber decided to go back to Mistra and take the coins. The man waited in the bushes again to slay his neighbor. And the people locked their doors again and whispered. Many days afterwards a goatherd found the church warden's

broken body on the rocks in one of the chasms. Some feel he lost his footing because he held the box in his arms and so was killed. Others feel the man jumped to forget he was a thief that had set the Devil free. Others feel the Devil crushed him in his twisted hands and pushed him down.

Petro and the herds searched for the box, but it was not anywhere they looked. Perhaps it went back into the air it grew from. Perhaps the Devil buried it and is waiting for someone to dig it up. Perhaps it is still lying there under one of the cypress trees on the mountain and waiting to be found. The herds in Mistra are still looking for it.

"Now, Panayia, will never give me my lamb," Petro said. The forty days had passed and Petro waited beside the stream, byt Kalessi did not come. A flock of Yria's sheep passed, by and slept and ate the grass a while: and Petro looked at the lambs that were in the flock, but Kalessi was not there. Father Elia called to Petro and was carrying a baby goat. The sun was on his red hair.

"A baby goat, Petro." Yria was sitting on the grass and dangling her legs in the water.

"Petro!" Father Elia called to him. "My goat was tired and I carried it."

Petro took the goat in his arms. He looked at the little knobs on his head. "Maa-aa-aa-aa," said the goat.

"I found out about Kalessi," Father Elia said.

"Kalessi?" Petro almost shouted.

"Kalessi;" Father Elia said. "Call him. Play the flute. Maybe he'll come. Go ahead."

"Kalessi" Petro put the goat down and looked across the stream. "Kallessi---" No lamb came to drink from the water.

But a sheep butted against him with its head--one of the new rams from Yria's flock. "Kalessi--" Petro laughed. "It's Kalessi. He's a sheep."

"So that's where the new ram came from. I've been looking for its owner," Yria said.

"Kalessi, you grew up." Petro closed his hands on the woolly hair, "Why didn't you tell me? I thought you were dead or a wolf ate you. Why didn't you dance when I played my flute?"

The ram bit the grass with its teeth.

"I'm so glad," Petro said. "I'm so glad."

Father Elia sat down beside Yria and watched the circles her feet made as they moved the water. "And with the reward Nicola got for catching that robber who took his coins and with the money he saved, he bought some goats, Petro. This little one's for you."

"For me?"

"Well," Yria said. "What a child. Not everybody's prayers are un-answered, eh, Petro? Here's the goat you asked for."

"And I can play the flute for our own goats, too, and

take them on the mountain. The hens never listened."

"That's right, Petro." Father Elia brushed water on his forehead and on his beard. "Don't ever stop playing that flute of yours. The Devil will always run to hide when he hears it. Eh, Yria?"

Yria nodded and Petro laughed and the Devil did keep out of Petro's way.

And Petro played the flute in Mistra and lived for many years. He had many goats and sheep and he took care of them all and he never forgot Kalessi. While Petro lived the people came from many towns to hear him play his flute whose music made a silver box and made the Devil fall asleep. Even today when the people have forgotten Petro, they can still hear the music from his flute that the trees caught with their leaves when he leaned against their branches and tried to make the goats and sheep jump the way the herds were dancing and tried to make the cherries grow.

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